

FAIRFAX FINANCIAL HOLDINGS LTD/ CAN

Form SUPPL

September 28, 2005

Table of Contents

Filed pursuant to General
Instruction II.L. of Form F-10;
File No. 333-122290

PROSPECTUS SUPPLEMENT
TO A SHORT FORM BASE SHELF PROSPECTUS DATED JANUARY 24, 2005

NEW ISSUE

September 27, 2005

FAIRFAX FINANCIAL HOLDINGS LIMITED

US\$300,000,000

1,843,318 Subordinate Voting Shares

**Price: US\$162.75 per Subordinate
Voting Share**

Fairfax Financial Holdings Limited is offering 1,843,318 Subordinate Voting Shares in the United States and in each of the provinces of Canada. Our outstanding Subordinate Voting Shares are listed for trading on the Toronto Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol FFH.SV and FFH, respectively. On September 27, 2005, the closing price of the Subordinate Voting Shares on the Toronto Stock Exchange was Cdn\$190.28, and on the New York Stock Exchange was US\$162.75. We have applied to list the Subordinate Voting Shares sold by us under this prospectus supplement on the Toronto Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange. Listing is subject to us fulfilling all the listing requirements of such exchanges.

Investing in the Subordinate Voting Shares involves risks. See Risk Factors beginning on page S-8 of this prospectus supplement and page 6 of the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

	Price to Purchaser	Proceeds to Fairfax Financial Holdings Limited(1)
Per Subordinate Voting Share	US\$162.75	US\$162.75
Total	US\$300,000,000	US\$300,000,000

(1) Before deducting expenses of this offering, estimated to be US\$350,000, which will be paid from the gross proceeds of the sale of the Subordinate Voting Shares.

No underwriter has been involved in the preparation of, or has performed any review of the contents of, this prospectus supplement or the accompanying base shelf prospectus. Offers in Canada will only be made by us to qualified purchasers in accordance with applicable exemptions from the registration requirements of the securities laws of each province. See Plan of Distribution.

The purchasers will agree to purchase the Subordinate Voting Shares subject to the approval of certain legal matters on our behalf by Torys LLP, with respect to matters of Canadian law, and Shearman & Sterling LLP, with respect to matters of U.S. law, and subject to certain conditions for the benefit of the purchasers.

The offering price of the Subordinate Voting Shares was determined by us with reference to the closing price of the Subordinate Voting Shares on the New York Stock Exchange on September 27, 2005. For more information, see Plan of Distribution.

It is expected that the closing of this offering will take place on or about October 12, 2005.

Table of Contents

We are permitted to prepare this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus in accordance with Canadian disclosure requirements, which are different from those of the United States. We prepare our financial statements in accordance with Canadian generally accepted accounting principles, and are subject to Canadian auditing and auditor independence standards. They may not be comparable to financial statements of United States companies.

Owning our Subordinate Voting Shares may subject you to tax consequences in the United States, Canada and other jurisdictions. This prospectus supplement may not describe these tax consequences fully. You should read the tax discussion in this prospectus supplement and consult your own tax adviser with respect to your own particular circumstances.

Your ability to enforce civil liabilities under the United States federal securities laws may be affected adversely because we are incorporated in Canada, our officers and most of our directors and certain of the experts named in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus are Canadian residents, and many of our assets are located outside the United States.

Neither the Securities and Exchange Commission nor any state or provincial securities regulator has approved or disapproved of these securities or determined if this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus are truthful or complete. Any representation to the contrary is a criminal offense.

S-2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prospectus Supplement	
<u>About This Prospectus Supplement</u>	S-4
<u>Enforceability Of Certain Civil Liabilities</u>	S-4
<u>Presentation Of Our Financial Information</u>	S-4
<u>Exchange Rate Data</u>	S-5
<u>Forward-Looking Statements</u>	S-5
<u>Recent Developments</u>	S-7
<u>Risk Factors</u>	S-8
<u>Consolidated Capitalization</u>	S-11
<u>Use Of Proceeds</u>	S-13
<u>Description Of Subordinate Voting Shares</u>	S-13
<u>Dividends</u>	S-15
<u>Plan Of Distribution</u>	S-15
<u>Documents Incorporated By Reference</u>	S-15
<u>Certain Income Tax Considerations</u>	S-17
<u>Legal Matters</u>	S-22
<u>Auditors, Transfer Agent And Registrar</u>	S-22
<u>Auditors Consent</u>	S-23
Prospectus	
<u>Enforceability of Certain Civil Liabilities</u>	2
<u>Presentation of Our Financial Information</u>	2
<u>Exchange Rate Data</u>	3
<u>Forward-Looking Statements</u>	3
<u>The Company</u>	5
<u>Risk Factors</u>	6
<u>Use of Proceeds</u>	15
<u>Insurance Regulatory Matters</u>	15
<u>Description of Debt Securities</u>	24
<u>Description of Subordinate Voting Shares and Preferred Shares</u>	37
<u>Description of Warrants</u>	41
<u>Description of Share Purchase Contracts</u>	43
<u>Description of Units</u>	44
<u>Plan of Distribution</u>	45
<u>Earnings Coverage Ratios</u>	46

Edgar Filing: FAIRFAX FINANCIAL HOLDINGS LTD/ CAN - Form SUPPL

<u>Certain Income Tax Considerations</u>	47
<u>Documents Incorporated by Reference</u>	48
<u>Legal Matters</u>	49
<u>Experts</u>	49
<u>Auditors, Transfer Agent and Registrar</u>	49
<u>List of Documents filed with the SEC</u>	50
<u>Auditors' Consent</u>	51

S-3

Table of Contents

ABOUT THIS PROSPECTUS SUPPLEMENT

This document is in two parts. The first part is this prospectus supplement, which describes the terms of the securities that we are currently offering. The second part is the accompanying base shelf prospectus, which gives more general information, some of which may not apply to the securities that we are currently offering. Generally, the term prospectus refers to both parts combined. Reference to the accompanying base shelf prospectus includes documents incorporated by reference therein. See Documents Incorporated by Reference .

You should read this prospectus supplement along with the accompanying base shelf prospectus. You should rely only on the information contained in or incorporated by reference in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus. We have not authorized any other person to provide you with different information. If anyone provides you with different or inconsistent information, you should not rely on it. You should not assume that the information provided by this prospectus supplement or the accompanying base shelf prospectus is accurate as of any date other than the date on the front of these documents. Our business, financial condition, results of operations and prospects may have changed since those dates. The Subordinate Voting Shares are being offered only in jurisdictions in which offers and sales are permitted.

If the information varies between this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus, the information in this prospectus supplement supercedes the information in the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

ENFORCEABILITY OF CERTAIN CIVIL LIABILITIES

We are a corporation organized under the laws of Canada and some of our assets are located in, and most of our directors and all of our officers are residents of, Canada. As a result, it may be difficult for United States investors to effect service of process within the United States upon our directors or officers, or to realize in the United States upon judgments of courts of the United States predicated upon civil liability of such directors or officers under U.S. federal securities laws. We have been advised by Torys LLP, our Canadian counsel, that a judgment of a U.S. court predicated solely upon civil liability under such laws would probably be enforceable in Canada if the U.S. court in which the judgment was obtained had a basis for jurisdiction in the matter that was recognized by a Canadian court for such purposes. We have also been advised by such counsel, however, that there is substantial doubt whether an action could be brought in Canada in the first instance on the basis of liability predicated solely upon such laws.

PRESENTATION OF OUR FINANCIAL INFORMATION

As the majority of our operations are in the United States or conducted in U.S. dollars, effective December 31, 2003, we report our consolidated financial statements in U.S. dollars in order to provide more meaningful information to users of our financial statements. Unless otherwise indicated, historical financial information contained in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus and in our audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2004, our unaudited interim consolidated financial statements for the three and six month periods ended June 30, 2005, our management's discussion and analysis for such periods and our renewal annual information form for the year ended December 31, 2004, each incorporated by reference in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus, has been reported in U.S. dollars based on currency exchange rates in effect during the period. All other financial information incorporated by reference in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus has been presented in Canadian dollars. In this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus, except where otherwise indicated, all dollar amounts are expressed in U.S. dollars, references to US\$, \$ and dollars are to U.S. dollars, and references to Cdn\$ are to Canadian dollars.

Our consolidated financial statements have been prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles in Canada, or Canadian GAAP, which differ from generally accepted accounting

Table of Contents

principles in the United States, or U.S. GAAP. For a discussion of the material differences between Canadian GAAP and U.S. GAAP as they relate to our financial statements, see note 19 to our audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2004 and note 8 to our unaudited interim financial statements for the three and six month periods ended June 30, 2005 incorporated by reference into this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

EXCHANGE RATE DATA

The following table sets forth, for each period indicated, the low and high exchange rates for Canadian dollars expressed in U.S. dollars, the exchange rate at the end of such period and the average of such exchange rates for each day during such period, based on the inverse of the noon buying rate in The City of New York for cable transfers in Canadian dollars as certified for customs purposes by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York:

	Six Months Ended June 30, 2005	Year Ended December 31				
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Low	0.7872	0.6410	0.6241	0.6200	0.6349	0.7158
High	0.8346	0.6969	0.6697	0.6619	0.7738	0.8493
Period End	0.8159	0.6669	0.6279	0.6329	0.7738	0.8310
Average	0.8096	0.6732	0.6457	0.6368	0.7136	0.7696

On September 27, 2005, the inverse of the noon buying rate was \$0.849 = Cdn\$1.00.

FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

Any statements made by us or on our behalf may include forward-looking statements that reflect our current views with respect to future events and financial performance. The words believe, anticipate, project, expect, plan, intend, predict, estimate, will likely result, will continue and similar expressions or the negative of such expressions identify forward-looking statements. These forward-looking statements relate to, among other things, our plans and objectives for future operations and underwriting profits. We caution readers not to place undue reliance on these forward-looking statements, which speak only as of their dates. We are under no obligation to update or alter such forward-looking statements as a result of new information, future events or otherwise. These forward-looking statements are subject to uncertainties and other factors that could cause actual results to differ materially from such statements. These uncertainties and other factors, which we describe in more detail elsewhere in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus, or in documents incorporated by reference in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus, include, but are not limited to:

risks associated with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita;

a reduction in net income if our loss reserves are insufficient;

underwriting losses on the risks we insure that are higher or lower than expected;

insufficient reserves for asbestos, environmental and other latent claims;

the lowering or loss of one of our subsidiaries' financial or claims-paying ability ratings;

an inability to realize our investment objectives;

changes in economic conditions, including interest rates and the securities markets, which could affect our investment portfolio;

exposure to credit risk in the event our reinsurers fail to make payments to us under our reinsurance arrangements;

Table of Contents

exposure to credit risk in the event our insureds fail to pay premiums that are owed to us or fail to reimburse us for deductibles that are paid by us on their behalf;

the occurrence of catastrophic events with a frequency or severity exceeding our estimates;

a decrease in the level of demand for our subsidiaries' reinsurance or insurance products, or increased competition in the insurance industry;

the cycle of the insurance market, which can determine our and our competitors' premium rates and capacity to write new business;

our inability to obtain reinsurance coverage at reasonable prices or on terms that adequately protect us;

the timing of loss payments being faster or the receipt of reinsurance recoverables being slower than anticipated by us;

adverse fluctuations in foreign currency exchange rates;

assessments and shared market mechanisms, which can adversely affect our U.S. insurance subsidiaries;

our failure to realize future income tax assets;

loss of key employees;

the influence exercisable by our controlling shareholder;

the passage of legislation subjecting our businesses to additional supervision or regulation, including additional tax regulation, in the United States, Canada or other jurisdictions in which we operate;

our inability to obtain required levels of capital on favourable terms, if at all;

our inability to access our subsidiaries' cash;

risks associated with requests for information from the SEC;

risks associated with current government investigations of, and class action litigation related to, insurance industry practices;

the failure of any of the loss limitation methods we employ;

an impairment in the value of our goodwill; and

risks associated with implementing our business strategies.

See "Risk Factors" in this prospectus supplement and in the accompanying base shelf prospectus for a further discussion of these risks and uncertainties.

Table of Contents

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Executive Changes

On May 13, 2005, we announced that Trevor Ambridge, after serving as our Chief Financial Officer for seven years, will concentrate full-time on his leadership of various strategic projects within our group of companies. Greg Taylor, who has served as the Chief Financial Officer of Northbridge Financial Corporation (Northbridge) since its initial public offering in May 2003, has assumed the office of Chief Financial Officer of Fairfax. John Varnell, who ceased serving as our Chief Financial Officer in 1998, has been appointed Chief Financial Officer of Northbridge.

SEC Information Requests Regarding Non-Traditional Insurance Products

On September 7, 2005, we announced that we had received a subpoena from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (the SEC) requesting documents regarding any non-traditional insurance or reinsurance product transactions entered into by the entities in the Fairfax group and any non-traditional insurance or reinsurance products offered by the entities in that group. On September 26, 2005, we announced that we received a further subpoena from the SEC as part of its investigation into such loss mitigation products, requesting documents regarding any transactions in our securities, the compensation for such transactions and the trading volume or share price of such securities. We had previously announced on June 24, 2005, that our subsidiary, Fairmont Specialty Group (Fairmont), had received a subpoena from the SEC requesting documents regarding any non-traditional insurance product transactions entered into by Fairmont with General Re Corporation or affiliates thereof. We are cooperating with these requests.

Losses from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

On September 8, 2005, we announced that our initial estimate of aggregate potential net losses relating to Hurricane Katrina will be in the range of \$175 million to \$220 million before tax and minority interests, or approximately \$108 million to \$134 million after tax and minority interests. This initial estimate was based on a preliminary review and on an estimated total insured loss from Hurricane Katrina of \$30 billion. We recognize that at this early stage it is not possible to make a calculation of our financial exposure to claims relating to Hurricane Katrina with a high degree of certainty.

On September 24, 2005, Hurricane Rita hit the U.S. Gulf coast and at this point we do not have an estimate of the losses we may incur as a result of the hurricane and of whether or not these losses may be material.

Our actual losses from Hurricane Katrina may vary materially from our initial estimate due to the inherent uncertainties in making such determinations resulting from several factors, including the preliminary nature of the available information, the potential inaccuracies and inadequacies in the data provided by clients and brokers, the modeling techniques and the application of such techniques, the contingent nature of business interruption exposures and the degree to which flood losses may be covered, as well as the effects of any resultant demand surge on claims activity. In addition, actual losses may increase if our reinsurers fail to meet their obligations or the reinsurance protections purchased by us are exhausted.

Estimate of Required Cash Flow Funding of European Runoff Group

We have recently estimated that our European runoff business is anticipated to require cash flow funding from us of \$150 million to \$200 million in 2006, prior to any management actions which would improve European runoff cash flow.

Table of Contents

Update on Financial Strength Ratings and Issuer Credit Ratings

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, A.M. Best has placed the financial strength rating of OdysseyRe's principal reinsurance and insurance subsidiaries (A (Excellent) with a negative outlook) under review with negative implications.

On August 9, 2005, Standard & Poor's Ratings Services announced that it affirmed our BB counterparty credit ratings and its BBB counterparty credit and financial strength ratings on our ongoing operating insurance companies and revised the outlook on each rating from stable to positive.

On September 23, 2005, Fitch Ratings affirmed our long-term issuer and senior debt ratings of B+ and revised its ratings outlook from negative to stable. Fitch also affirmed its insurer financial strength ratings of various of our insurance subsidiaries and revised its ratings outlook for each subsidiary from negative to stable.

Financial strength ratings and issuer credit ratings are not ratings of our Subordinate Voting Shares and are not recommendations to purchase, hold or sell our Subordinate Voting Shares.

RISK FACTORS

An investment in our Subordinate Voting Shares involves risk. You should carefully consider the following risk factors below, as well as the risk factors beginning at page 6 of the accompanying base shelf prospectus and the other information contained in or incorporated by reference into this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus, before deciding whether to invest in our Subordinate Voting Shares. Any of such risks could materially adversely affect our business, financial condition or results of operations. Additional risks and uncertainties not currently known to us or that we currently deem to be immaterial may also materially and adversely affect our business, financial condition or results of operations.

Risks Related to Our Business

In addition to the risk factors described in the accompanying base shelf prospectus, we are subject to the following risk factors related to our business:

Uncertainty related to estimated losses from Hurricane Katrina and losses related to Hurricane Rita may materially impact our financial results.

On September 8, 2005, we announced that our initial estimate of aggregate potential net losses relating to Hurricane Katrina will be in the range of \$175 million to \$220 million before tax and minority interests, or approximately \$108 million to \$134 million after tax and minority interests. This initial estimate was based on a preliminary review and on an estimated total insured loss from Hurricane Katrina of \$30 billion. We recognize that at this early stage it is not possible to make a calculation of our financial exposure to claims relating to Hurricane Katrina with a high degree of certainty.

On September 24, 2005, Hurricane Rita hit the U.S. Gulf Coast and at this point we do not have an estimate of the losses we may incur as a result of the hurricane and of whether or not these losses may be material.

At the time of making the estimate related to Hurricane Katrina noted above we had received a limited number of loss indications and formal loss advices from clients. Accordingly, the estimate was based mainly on industry loss estimates, output from industry models and a review of our potential exposures under in-force contracts. Actual losses may vary materially from these estimates.

In addition, our estimate is subject to a high level of uncertainty arising out of extremely complex and unique causation and coverage issues, including the appropriate attribution of losses to flood damage as opposed to other perils such as wind, fire or riot and civil commotion. The underlying policies generally contain exclusions for flood damage; however, water damage caused by wind may be covered. We expect

Table of Contents

that these causation and coverage issues may not be resolved for a considerable period of time and may be influenced by evolving legal and regulatory developments.

Our actual losses from Hurricane Katrina may vary materially from our initial estimate due to the inherent uncertainties in making such determinations resulting from several factors, including the preliminary nature of the available information, the potential inaccuracies and inadequacies in the data provided by clients and brokers, the modeling techniques and the application of such techniques, the contingent nature of business interruption exposures and the degree to which flood losses may be covered, as well as the effects of any resultant demand surge on claims activity. In addition, actual losses may increase if our reinsurers fail to meet their obligations or the reinsurance protections purchased by us are exhausted.

In addition, the National Hurricane Center has predicted that other major hurricanes will hit the United States before this year's hurricane season is over. Losses from additional hurricanes could adversely affect our financial results.

A downgrade by ratings agencies in the ratings of our insurance and reinsurance subsidiaries may materially and negatively impact our business and results of operations.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, A.M. Best has placed the financial strength rating of OdysseyRe's principal reinsurance and insurance subsidiaries and OdysseyRe's issuer credit rating under review with negative implications. Ratings have become an increasingly important factor in establishing the competitive position of insurance and reinsurance companies. If the ratings of our insurance and reinsurance subsidiaries are reduced from their current levels by ratings agencies, their competitive position in the reinsurance and insurance industries would suffer and it would be more difficult for them to market their products. A downgrade could result in a substantial loss of business as ceding companies and brokers that place such business move to other insurers and reinsurers with higher ratings. We cannot give any assurance regarding whether or to what extent the rating agencies may downgrade such ratings. These ratings are not evaluations directed to investors in securities or a recommendation to buy, sell or hold securities. Such ratings may be revised or revoked at the sole discretion of the rating agencies. See "Recent Developments" Update on Financial Strength Ratings and Issuer Credit Ratings in this prospectus supplement and "Risk Factors" If our insurance and reinsurance subsidiaries are unable to maintain favorable financial strength ratings, it may be more difficult for them to maintain or write new business in the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

SEC Information Requests Regarding Non-Traditional Insurance Products

On September 7, 2005, we announced that we had received a subpoena from the SEC requesting documents regarding any non-traditional insurance or reinsurance product transactions entered into by the entities in the Fairfax group and any non-traditional insurance or reinsurance products offered by the entities in that group. On September 26, 2005, we announced that we received a further subpoena from the SEC as part of its investigation into such loss mitigation products, requesting documents regarding any transactions in our securities, the compensation for such transactions and the trading volume or share price of such securities. We had previously announced on June 24, 2005, that our subsidiary, Fairmont, had received a subpoena from the SEC requesting documents regarding any non-traditional insurance product transactions entered into by Fairmont with General Re Corporation or affiliates thereof. We are cooperating with these requests.

We cannot predict at this time the effect that complying with these subpoenas will have on our business. However, the cost of cooperating with the subpoenas will be significant and may require significant attention of management, diverting focus away from our business. We cannot assure you that we will not be subject to further requests or other proceedings by the SEC or other regulatory authorities, or related private civil actions, that could have a material adverse effect on our business or financial condition. In addition, we could be materially adversely affected by negative publicity related to these subpoenas or any similar proceedings. Any of the possible consequences noted above, or the perception

Table of Contents

that any of them could occur, could have an adverse effect upon the market price for our Subordinate Voting Shares.

Risks Related to Our Subordinate Voting Shares

The market price of our Subordinate Voting Shares may be subject to fluctuations and volatility.

The market price of our Subordinate Voting Shares has been subject to fluctuations and volatility. These fluctuations and volatility could continue. Among the factors that could affect the market price of our Subordinate Voting Shares are those discussed in the accompanying base shelf prospectus, as well as:

risks related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita;

actual or anticipated variations in our operating results;

introductions of innovations, new services or products or significant price reductions by us or our competitors;

changes in financial reports by securities analysts;

a downgrade, suspension or withdrawal of the rating assigned by a rating agency to our senior debt;

the occurrence of major catastrophic events;

risks associated with requests for information from the SEC;

risks associated with current government investigations of, and class action litigation related to, insurance industry practices;

general market conditions; and

any of the other events discussed in the Risk Factors section beginning at page 6 of the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

The stock markets have experienced extreme volatility that has often been unrelated to the operating performance of particular companies. These broad market fluctuations may adversely affect the trading price of our Subordinate Voting Shares. As a result, you may not be able to resell your Subordinate Voting Shares at or above the offering price.

Table of Contents**CONSOLIDATED CAPITALIZATION****Canadian GAAP**

The table below sets forth our capitalization as of June 30, 2005 under Canadian GAAP. The **As Adjusted** column reflects our capitalization after giving effect to:

the issuance of 1,843,318 Subordinate Voting Shares pursuant to this offering;

the rights offering by our subsidiary, Lindsey Morden Group Inc. (Lindsey Morden), which expired on August 30, 2005 and raised net proceeds of \$27.1 million, which were used to partially repay borrowings by one of Lindsey Morden's subsidiaries; and

the repurchase from August 2, 2005 to September 12, 2005 of \$11.6 million aggregate principal amount of OdysseyRe's 4.375% convertible senior debentures due 2022.

You should read this table in conjunction with our audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2004 and our unaudited interim consolidated financial statements for the three and six months ended June 30, 2005 incorporated by reference into this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

	As of June 30, 2005	
	Actual	As Adjusted
	(Dollars in millions)	
Cash, short-term investments and marketable securities	\$ 499.5	\$ 773.6
Debt(1)		
Long-term debt	\$2,014.3	\$2,002.7
Purchase consideration payable	193.6	193.6
Trust preferred securities of subsidiaries	52.4	52.4
Convertible senior debentures due 2023	136.7	136.7
Indebtedness of Lindsey Morden Group Inc.	184.7	157.6
Total debt	2,581.7	2,543.0
Non-controlling interests(2)	640.3	642.4
Shareholders' equity		
Common shareholders' equity	1,781.8	2,081.5
Other paid in capital(3)	59.4	59.4
Preferred shares	136.6	136.6
Retained earnings	1,074.9	1,074.9
Currency translation account	111.5	111.5
Total shareholders' equity	3,164.2	3,463.9
Total capitalization	\$6,386.2	\$6,649.3

(1) See notes 5 and 6 of our audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2004, incorporated by reference in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus, for more details on our long-term debt and trust preferred securities.

Edgar Filing: FAIRFAX FINANCIAL HOLDINGS LTD/ CAN - Form SUPPL

- (2) Includes minority interest in OdysseyRe, Northbridge and Lindsey Morden.
- (3) In accordance with Canadian GAAP, the convertible senior debentures issued July 14, 2003 are recorded as components of debt and equity. The amount recorded in equity represents the value of the holders' option to convert the debentures into Subordinate Voting Shares and the remaining equity portion of the convertible senior debentures is included in liabilities as long-term debt.

S-11

Table of Contents**U.S. GAAP**

The table below sets forth our capitalization as of June 30, 2005 under U.S. GAAP. The **As Adjusted** column reflects our capitalization after giving effect to:

the issuance of 1,843,318 Subordinate Voting Shares pursuant to this offering;

the rights offering by Lindsey Morden which expired on August 30, 2005 and raised net proceeds of \$27.1 million, which were used to partially repay borrowings by one of Lindsey Morden's subsidiaries; and

the repurchase from August 2, 2005 to September 12, 2005 of \$11.6 million aggregate principal amount of OdysseyRe's 4.375% convertible senior debentures due 2022.

You should read this table in conjunction with our audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2004 and our unaudited interim consolidated financial statements for the three and six months ended June 30, 2005, incorporated by reference into this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus. For a discussion of the material differences between Canadian GAAP and U.S. GAAP as they relate to our financial statements, see note 19 to our audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2004 and note 8 to our unaudited interim consolidated financial statements for the three and six months ended June 30, 2005 incorporated by reference into this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

	As of June 30, 2005	
	Actual	As Adjusted
	(Dollars in millions)	
Cash, short-term investments and marketable securities	\$ 499.5	\$ 773.6
Debt(1)		
Long-term debt	\$2,014.3	\$2,002.7
Purchase consideration payable	193.6	193.6
Trust preferred securities of subsidiaries	52.4	52.4
Convertible senior debentures due 2023	196.1	196.1
Indebtedness of Lindsey Morden	184.7	157.6
Total debt	2,641.1	2,602.4
Non-controlling interests(2)	638.3	640.4
Shareholders' equity		
Common shareholders' equity	1,781.8	2,081.5
Preferred shares	136.6	136.6
Retained earnings	625.6	625.6
Other comprehensive income	543.1	543.1
Total shareholders' equity	3,087.1	3,386.8
Total capitalization	\$6,366.5	\$6,629.6

(1) See notes 5 and 6 of our audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2004, incorporated by reference in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus, for more details on our long-term debt and trust preferred securities.

(2) Includes minority interest in OdysseyRe, Northbridge and Lindsey Morden.

Table of Contents

USE OF PROCEEDS

The estimated net proceeds from this offering, after deducting the estimated expenses of the offering, will be \$299,650,000. We intend to use the net proceeds from this offering to augment our cash, short term investments and marketable securities held at the holding company level.

DESCRIPTION OF SUBORDINATE VOTING SHARES

The following briefly summarizes the provisions of our articles of incorporation relating to our Subordinate Voting Shares, including a description of our Multiple Voting Shares. The following description may not be complete and is subject to, and qualified in its entirety by reference to, the terms and provisions of our articles of incorporation.

Our authorized share capital consists of an unlimited number of Multiple Voting Shares carrying ten votes per share, an unlimited number of Subordinate Voting Shares carrying one vote per share and an unlimited number of preferred shares, issuable in series. At September 27, 2005, there were 1,548,000 Multiple Voting Shares, 15,342,759 Subordinate Voting Shares, 3,000,000 Series A preferred shares and 5,000,000 Series B preferred shares outstanding. The number of shares outstanding includes 799,230 shares effectively held by Fairfax through an ownership interest in Sixty Two Investment Company Limited (Sixty Two).

Multiple Voting Shares and Subordinate Voting Shares

Dividend Rights

Holders of Multiple Voting Shares and Subordinate Voting Shares participate equally as to dividends and are entitled to dividends, in equal amounts per share and at the same time, that our board of directors may declare out of legally available funds, subject to the preferential dividend rights of the preferred shares.

Voting Rights

Holders of Multiple Voting Shares and Subordinate Voting Shares are entitled to receive notice of any meeting of our shareholders and may attend and vote at such meetings, except those meetings where only the holders of shares of another class or of a particular series are entitled to vote. The Multiple Voting Shares are entitled to ten votes per share, except as set forth below, and the Subordinate Voting Shares are entitled to one vote per share.

The ten votes per share attached to the Multiple Voting Shares are automatically and permanently reduced to one vote per share if:

(i) the number of the Multiple Voting Shares held by Sixty Two (and its 75% owned subsidiaries, of which there are currently none) falls below 1,197,480 shares, unless this results from a sale of shares to purchasers who make an equivalent unconditional offer to purchase all outstanding Subordinate Voting Shares; or

(ii) the number of the Multiple Voting Shares held by purchasers referred to in (i) above (and their 75% owned subsidiaries) falls below 1,197,480.

A change of control of Sixty Two or a purchaser referred to in (i) above will disqualify that shareholder's holding of shares for the purposes of the calculations contained in (i) and (ii) above. Except in connection with a sale to a purchaser who makes an offer to purchase all outstanding Subordinate Voting Shares as contemplated by (i) above, Sixty Two has agreed with us that it will not sell our shares carrying multiple voting rights (except to its 75% owned subsidiaries).

The number of votes attached to the Multiple Voting Shares will automatically but temporarily be reduced to one vote per share for any shareholders' meeting if, during the three months ending ten days prior to the date we send notice of the shareholders' meeting, the weighted average trading price in the

Table of Contents

principal trading market of the Subordinate Voting Shares for any period of thirty consecutive trading days is less than \$4.00 per share (subject to adjustment).

Preemptive, Subscription, Redemption and Conversion Rights

Holders of Subordinate Voting Shares and Multiple Voting Shares have no preemptive, subscription or redemption rights. Holders of Subordinate Voting Shares have no conversion rights. Multiple Voting Shares are convertible at any time into Subordinate Voting Shares on the basis of one Subordinate Voting Share for each Multiple Voting Share being converted.

Liquidation Rights

Upon our liquidation, dissolution or winding up, whether voluntary or involuntary, the holders of the Subordinate Voting Shares and Multiple Voting Shares, without preference or distinction, are entitled to receive ratably all of our assets remaining after payment of all debts and other liabilities, subject to the prior rights of holders of any outstanding preferred shares and any other prior ranking shares.

Modifications

Modifications to the provisions attaching to the Multiple Voting Shares as a class, or to the Subordinate Voting Shares as a class, require the separate affirmative vote of two-thirds of the votes cast at meetings of the holders of the shares of each class.

No subdivision or consolidation of the Multiple Voting Shares or of the Subordinate Voting Shares may take place unless the shares of both classes are subdivided or consolidated at the same time in the same manner and proportion.

No rights to acquire additional shares or other securities or property of ours will be issued to holders of Multiple Voting Shares or Subordinate Voting Shares unless the same rights are issued at the same time to holders of shares of both classes.

Table of Contents

DIVIDENDS

We did not pay dividends on our Subordinate Voting Shares or Multiple Voting Shares from 1985 to 2001, although no restrictions existed which would have prevented the payment of dividends. We paid an initial annual dividend of Cdn\$1.00 per Subordinate Voting Share or Multiple Voting Share on January 24, 2002 and an annual dividend of Cdn\$1.50, \$1.40 and \$1.40 per Subordinate Voting Share or Multiple Voting Share on January 27, 2003, January 28, 2004 and January 28, 2005, respectively.

The declaration and payment of dividends are at the sole discretion of our board of directors and depend on, among other things, our financial condition, general business conditions, legal restrictions regarding the payment of dividends by us and other factors which the board of directors may in the future consider to be relevant. As a holding company with no direct operations, we rely on cash dividends and other payments from our subsidiaries and our own cash balances to pay dividends to our shareholders. The ability of our subsidiaries to pay these amounts is limited. See Risk Factors beginning at page 6 of the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

PLAN OF DISTRIBUTION

Each purchaser of Subordinate Voting Shares has entered into a subscription agreement with us. Pursuant to the subscription agreements, we have agreed to issue and sell, and the purchasers have agreed to purchase, subject to the receipt of customary legal opinions from our Canadian and U.S. counsel, an aggregate of 1,843,318 Subordinate Voting Shares, on or about October 12, 2005.

This offering is being made concurrently in the United States and in each of the provinces of Canada pursuant to the multijurisdictional disclosure system implemented by the securities regulatory authorities in the United States and Canada. The Subordinate Voting Shares were offered directly by us in the United States and in each of the provinces of Canada. Offers and sales in Canada were made by us to accredited investors, as such term is defined in National Instrument 45-106, in accordance with applicable exemptions from the registration requirements of securities laws of the provinces of Canada. Each purchaser of Subordinate Voting Shares in Canada has made certain representations and warranties to us as to its qualification to purchase the Subordinate Voting Shares pursuant to such exemptions.

We have applied to list the Subordinate Voting Shares offered under this prospectus supplement on the Toronto Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange. Listing will be subject to us fulfilling all the listing requirements of such exchanges.

The offering price of the Subordinate Voting Shares was determined by us with reference to the recent trading price of the Subordinate Voting Shares on the New York Stock Exchange.

We estimate our expenses in connection with the offering to be approximately \$350,000.

No underwriter has been involved in the preparation of, or has performed any review of the contents of, this prospectus supplement or the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE

This prospectus supplement is deemed to be incorporated by reference into the accompanying base shelf prospectus dated January 24, 2005 solely for the purpose of this offering of Subordinate Voting Shares.

The following documents filed by us with the securities commission or similar authority in each of the provinces of Canada and filed with or furnished to the SEC pursuant to the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, are specifically incorporated by reference in this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus:

1. our renewal annual information form for the year ended December 31, 2004, dated March 31, 2005;

S-15

Table of Contents

2. our audited comparative consolidated financial statements and the notes thereto, including balance sheets as at December 31, 2004 and 2003 and earnings, retained earnings and cash flow statements for each of the years in the three year period ended December 31, 2004, together with the report of the auditors thereon;

3. our management's discussion and analysis for the periods referred to in paragraph 2;

4. our unaudited interim consolidated financial statements and the notes thereto, including our balance sheet as at June 30, 2005, earnings and cash flow statements for the three and six month periods ended June 30, 2005 and 2004 and retained earnings statements for the six month periods ended June 30, 2005 and 2004;

5. our management's discussion and analysis for the periods referred to in paragraph 4; and

6. our management information circular dated March 4, 2005 in connection with the annual meeting of shareholders held on April 12, 2005, other than the sections entitled "Executive Compensation", "Performance Graph" and "Statement of Corporate Governance Practices".

Any documents of the types referred to in paragraphs 1 to 6 above and any material change reports (excluding confidential material change reports) filed by us with the securities regulatory authorities in Canada or filed with or furnished to the SEC after the date of this prospectus supplement and prior to the termination of the offering of Subordinate Voting Shares hereunder shall be deemed to be incorporated by reference into this prospectus supplement and the accompanying prospectus. In addition, any report filed with or furnished to the SEC by us pursuant to Section 13(a) or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, or submitted by us to the SEC pursuant to Rule 12g3-2(b) under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, after the date of this prospectus supplement shall be deemed to be incorporated by reference into this prospectus supplement and the registration statement of which this prospectus supplement forms a part, if and to the extent expressly provided in such report.

Any statement contained in a document incorporated or deemed to be incorporated by reference herein shall be deemed to be modified or superseded for the purposes of this prospectus supplement to the extent that a statement contained herein, or in any other subsequently filed document which also is or is deemed to be incorporated by reference herein, modifies or supersedes that statement. The modifying or superseding statement need not state that it has modified or superseded a prior statement or include any other information set forth in the document that it modifies or supersedes. The making of a modifying or superseding statement shall not be deemed an admission for any purposes that the modified or superseded statement, when made, constituted a misrepresentation, an untrue statement of a material fact or an omission to state a material fact that is required to be stated or that is necessary to make a statement not misleading in light of the circumstances in which it was made. Any statement so modified or superseded shall not be deemed, except as so modified or superseded, to constitute a part of this prospectus supplement and the accompanying base shelf prospectus.

Table of Contents

CERTAIN INCOME TAX CONSIDERATIONS

Certain Canadian Federal Income Tax Information For Canadian Residents

The following is a summary of the principal Canadian federal income tax considerations generally applicable to prospective purchasers of the Subordinate Voting Shares who, within the meaning of the *Income Tax Act (Canada)* (the Tax Act), and at all relevant times, are or are deemed to be residents of Canada, deal at arm's length with us, and hold or will hold their Subordinate Voting Shares as capital property (each a Resident Purchaser). Resident Purchasers whose Subordinate Voting Shares do not otherwise qualify as capital property may, in certain circumstances, make the irrevocable election under subsection 39(4) of the Tax Act to have their Subordinate Voting Shares and every Canadian security (as defined in the Tax Act) owned by such Resident Purchaser in the taxation year of the election, and in all subsequent years, deemed to be capital property.

The Tax Act contains certain provisions (the Mark-to-Market Rules) relating to securities held by certain financial institutions, registered securities dealers and corporations controlled by one or more of the foregoing. This summary does not take into account the Mark-to-Market Rules, and taxpayers that are financial institutions as defined for the purpose of the Mark-to-Market Rules should consult their own tax advisors.

This summary is based upon the current provisions of the Tax Act and regulations thereunder in force as at the date hereof, specific proposals to amend the Tax Act or regulations thereunder that have been publicly announced by the Minister of Finance (Canada) prior to the date hereof (the Proposed Amendments), and counsel's understanding of the current administrative practices of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Except as otherwise indicated, this summary does not take into account or anticipate any changes in the applicable law, nor does it take into account provincial, territorial or foreign tax laws or considerations, which might differ significantly from those discussed herein. No assurance can be given that the Proposed Amendments will be enacted or that they will be enacted in the form announced by the Minister of Finance (Canada).

This summary is of a general nature only and is not intended to be, nor should it be construed to be, legal or tax advice to any particular investor. This summary is not exhaustive of all possible income tax considerations under the Tax Act that may affect an investor. Accordingly, prospective purchasers of Subordinate Voting Shares should consult their own tax advisors with respect to their particular circumstances.

For purposes of the Tax Act, all amounts relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of Subordinate Voting Shares must be expressed in Canadian dollars including dividends, adjusted cost base and proceeds of disposition; amounts denominated in United States dollars must be converted into Canadian dollars based on the prevailing United States dollar exchange rate generally at the time these amounts arise.

Taxation of Dividends

Dividends received on Subordinate Voting Shares by a Resident Purchaser who is an individual will be included in the individual's income and be subject to the gross-up and dividend tax credit rules normally applicable to taxable dividends received by an individual from taxable Canadian corporations. Taxable dividends received by an individual may give rise to alternative minimum tax under the Tax Act, depending on the individual's circumstances.

Dividends received by a Resident Purchaser that is a corporation will be included in income and normally will be deductible in computing such corporation's taxable income. However, the Tax Act will generally impose a 33 1/3% refundable Part IV tax on such dividends received by a corporation that was, at any time in the taxation year in which such dividends were received, a private corporation as defined in the Tax Act, or a corporation resident in Canada that is controlled by or for the benefit of an individual

Table of Contents

(other than a trust) or a related group of individuals (other than trusts), to the extent that such dividends are deductible in computing the corporation's taxable income.

Disposition of Subordinate Voting Shares

In general, a disposition, or a deemed disposition, of a Subordinate Voting Share by a Resident Purchaser will give rise to a capital gain (or a capital loss) equal to the amount by which the proceeds of disposition of the Subordinate Voting Share, net of any reasonable costs of disposition, exceed (or are less than) the adjusted cost base to the holder of the Subordinate Voting Share. In the event a Resident Purchaser who acquires Subordinate Voting Shares also holds other Subordinate Voting Shares, the adjusted cost base will be determined by averaging the cost of the Subordinate Voting Shares with the adjusted cost base of all other Subordinate Voting Shares then held by that Resident Purchaser.

Generally, one-half of a capital gain must be included in income as a taxable capital gain and one-half of a capital loss is an allowable capital loss. An allowable capital loss realized in a year normally may be deducted by the Resident Purchaser in computing income to the extent of any taxable capital gains realized in the year. Any allowable capital loss not deductible in the year it is realized generally may be carried back and deducted against taxable capital gains in any of the three preceding years or carried forward and deducted against taxable capital gains in any subsequent year (in accordance with the rules contained in the Tax Act). Capital gains realized by an individual will be relevant in computing possible liability for the alternative minimum tax.

The amount of any capital loss realized on the disposition or deemed disposition of a Subordinate Voting Share by a Resident Purchaser that is a corporation may be reduced by the amount of dividends received or deemed to have been received by it on the Subordinate Voting Share to the extent and in the circumstances prescribed by the Tax Act. Similar rules may apply to a corporation that is a member of a partnership or a beneficiary of a trust that owns Subordinate Voting Shares and where a trust is a member of a partnership or a partnership or trust is a beneficiary of a trust. Resident Purchasers to whom these rules may be relevant should consult their own tax advisors.

A Resident Purchaser that is a Canadian-controlled private corporation (as defined in the Tax Act) may be liable to pay an additional refundable tax of 6 2/3% on certain investment income, including amounts in respect of taxable capital gains (but not dividends or deemed dividends deductible in computing taxable income).

Certain Canadian Federal Income Tax Information For U.S. Residents

The following summarizes the principal Canadian federal income tax considerations generally applicable to the holding and disposition of Subordinate Voting Shares by a holder (a) who, for the purposes of the Tax Act, is not resident in Canada, deals at arm's length and is not affiliated with us, holds the Subordinate Voting Shares as capital property and does not use or hold, and is not deemed to use or hold, the Subordinate Voting Shares in the course of carrying on, or otherwise in connection with, a business in Canada, and (b) who, for the purposes of the *Canada-United States Income Tax Convention* (the Treaty), is a resident of the United States, has never been a resident of Canada, has not held or used (and does not hold or use) Subordinate Voting Shares in connection with a permanent establishment or fixed base in Canada, and who otherwise qualifies for the full benefits of the Treaty. The Subordinate Voting Shares will generally be considered to be capital property to a holder unless such shares are held in the course of carrying on a business, or in an adventure or concern in the nature of trade. For purposes of this discussion Certain Canadian Federal Income Tax Information For U.S. Residents holders who meet all such criteria in clauses (a) and (b) are referred to herein as a U.S. Holder or U.S. Holders, and this summary only addresses such U.S. Holders. The summary does not deal with special situations, such as particular circumstances of traders or dealers, limited liability companies, tax-exempt entities, insurers, financial institutions (including those to which the Mark-to-Market Rules apply), or others.

This summary is based on the current provisions of the Tax Act and the regulations thereunder, all Proposed Amendments publicly announced by the Minister of Finance (Canada) prior to the date hereof,

Table of Contents

the current provisions of the Treaty and the current administrative practices of the CRA. It has been assumed that the Proposed Amendments will be enacted as proposed and that there will be no other relevant change in any governing law, the Treaty or administrative practice, although no assurance can be given in these respects. The summary does not take into account provincial, U.S. or other foreign income tax considerations, which may differ significantly from those discussed herein.

This summary is not exhaustive of all possible Canadian income tax consequences. It is not intended as legal or tax advice to any particular holder of Subordinate Voting Shares and should not be so construed. The tax consequences to any particular holder of Subordinate Voting Shares will vary according to the status of that holder as an individual, trust, corporation or member of a partnership, the jurisdictions in which that holder is subject to taxation and, generally, that holder's particular circumstances. Each holder should consult the holder's own tax advisor with respect to the income tax consequences applicable to the holder's own particular circumstances.

Taxation of Dividends

Dividends paid or credited or deemed to be paid or credited by us to a U.S. Holder are subject to Canadian withholding tax. Under the Treaty, the rate of withholding tax on dividends paid or credited to a U.S. Holder is generally limited to 15% of the gross dividend.

Disposition of Subordinate Voting Shares

A U.S. Holder is not subject to tax under the Tax Act in respect of a capital gain realized on the disposition of a Subordinate Voting Share unless the share is taxable Canadian property to the U.S. Holder, and even then only if the U.S. Holder is not entitled to relief under the Treaty.

A Subordinate Voting Share will be taxable Canadian property to a U.S. Holder if, at any time during the 60-month period ending at the time of disposition, the U.S. Holder or persons with whom the U.S. Holder did not deal at arm's length (or the U.S. Holder together with such persons) owned 25% or more of our issued shares of any class or series. In the case of a U.S. Holder to whom Subordinate Voting Shares represent taxable Canadian property, by reason of the Treaty, no tax under the Tax Act will be payable on a capital gain realized on a disposition of such shares unless, at the time of disposition, the value of such shares is derived principally from real property situated in Canada. We believe that the value of our Subordinate Voting Shares is not derived principally from real property situated in Canada, and that no tax would be payable under the Tax Act on a capital gain realized today by a U.S. Holder on a disposition of Subordinate Voting Shares.

Certain U.S. Federal Income Tax Information For U.S. Holders

The following is a discussion of the material U.S. federal income tax consequences to U.S. Holders, as defined below for purposes of this discussion Certain U.S. Federal Income Tax Information for U.S. Holders, of the holding and disposition of Subordinate Voting Shares. The discussion is based on the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (the Code), U.S. Treasury regulations, judicial authorities, published positions of the Internal Revenue Service (the IRS) and other applicable authorities, all as in effect on the date hereof and all of which are subject to change, possibly with retroactive effect.

A U.S. Holder is a beneficial owner of the Subordinate Voting Shares that is (a) an individual U.S. citizen or resident alien for U.S. federal income tax purposes; (b) a corporation, or other entity taxable as a corporation for U.S. federal income tax purposes, created or organized under the laws of the United States, the District of Columbia or any State in the United States; (c) an estate the income of which is subject to U.S. federal income taxation regardless of its source; or (d) a trust, if its administration is subject to the primary supervision of a U.S. court and one or more U.S. persons have the authority to control all substantial decisions of the trust, or if it has made a valid election under applicable Treasury regulations to be treated as a U.S. person.

Table of Contents

The discussion only addresses U.S. Holders who hold the Subordinate Voting Shares as capital assets within the meaning of Section 1221 of the Code. This discussion does not address all the tax consequences that might be relevant to U.S. Holders in light of their particular circumstances or the U.S. federal income tax consequences to U.S. Holders subject to special treatment under U.S. federal income tax laws, including but not limited to banks and other financial institutions, insurance companies, dealers in securities or foreign currency, traders that have elected mark-to-market accounting, tax-exempt organizations, certain former citizens or residents of the United States, persons that actually or constructively own 10% or more of our voting stock, persons that hold the Subordinate Voting Shares as part of a straddle, hedge, conversion transaction or other integrated investment, or U.S. Holders that have a functional currency other than the U.S. dollar, all of whom may be subject to tax rules that differ significantly from those summarized below.

If a partnership, or other entity taxed as a partnership for U.S. federal income tax purposes, holds the Subordinate Voting Shares, the U.S. federal income tax treatment of a partner in the partnership will depend on the status of the partner and the activities of the partnership. Partnerships that hold the Subordinate Voting Shares, and partners in such partnerships, are urged to consult their own tax advisors regarding the U.S. federal income tax consequences of holding the Subordinate Voting Shares.

Prospective investors are urged to consult their own tax advisors regarding the U.S. federal income tax consequences of the holding and disposition of the Subordinate Voting Shares in their particular circumstances.

Taxation of Dividends

Subject to the passive foreign investment company (PFIC) rules discussed below, distributions with respect to our Subordinate Voting Shares (before reduction for Canadian withholding taxes) out of our current or accumulated earnings and profits, as determined for U.S. federal income tax purposes, will be dividends and will be includable in a U.S. Holder's ordinary income when received. Dividends received by a non-corporate U.S. Holder, including an individual, during taxable years beginning before 2009 will be taxed at a maximum rate of 15%, provided the taxpayer has held the stock for more than 60 days during the 121-day period beginning 60 days before the ex-dividend date and certain other conditions are satisfied. Dividends received from a non-U.S. corporation generally will qualify for this reduced tax rate if the corporation is eligible for the benefits of a comprehensive income tax treaty with the United States that includes an exchange of information provision and that the U.S. Treasury Department has determined to be satisfactory for purposes of the qualified dividend provisions of the Code. The U.S. Treasury Department issued a notice determining that the Treaty is satisfactory for such purposes. Dividends received from a non-U.S. corporation that otherwise meets this qualification will not qualify for the reduced rate if the non-U.S. corporation is a PFIC for the current taxable year or was a PFIC for the previous taxable year. We believe that we are eligible for the benefits of the Treaty and that any dividends that we pay should qualify for the 15% maximum tax rate. Dividends received by a non-corporate U.S. Holder for taxable years after 2008 will be subject to tax at ordinary income tax rates. Dividends on our Subordinate Voting Shares will not be eligible for the dividends-received deduction generally allowed to U.S. corporations.

The amount of any dividend paid in Canadian dollars will equal the U.S. dollar value of the Canadian dollars received, calculated by reference to the exchange rate in effect on the date the dividend is received by a U.S. Holder regardless of whether the Canadian dollars are converted into U.S. dollars. If the Canadian dollars received as a dividend are not converted into U.S. dollars at the date of receipt, a U.S. Holder will have a U.S. tax basis in the Canadian dollars equal to the U.S. dollar value on the date of receipt. Any gain or loss realized on a subsequent conversion or other disposition of the Canadian dollars will be treated as ordinary income or loss, and generally will be income or loss from sources within the United States for U.S. foreign tax credit purposes.

A U.S. Holder may be entitled to claim a U.S. foreign tax credit for, or deduct, Canadian taxes that are withheld on dividends received by a U.S. Holder, subject to applicable limitations in the Code.

Table of Contents

Dividends will be income from sources outside the United States and for tax years beginning before January 1, 2007, generally will be passive income or financial services income, and for tax years beginning after December 31, 2006, generally will be passive category income or general category income for purposes of computing the U.S. foreign tax credit allowable to a U.S. Holder. The rules governing the U.S. foreign tax credit are complex, and additional limitations on the credit apply to non-corporate U.S. Holders that receive dividends from foreign corporations if the dividends are eligible for the 15% maximum tax rate on dividends described above. Investors are urged to consult their tax advisors regarding the availability of the U.S. foreign tax credit under their particular circumstances.

To the extent that the amount of any distribution exceeds our current and accumulated earnings and profits for a taxable year, the distribution will first be treated as a tax-free return of capital to the extent of a U.S. Holder's tax basis in the Subordinate Voting Shares, and any excess over basis will result in capital gain. Such an excess distribution would not give rise to income from sources outside the United States.

Disposition of Subordinate Voting Shares

For U.S. federal income tax purposes, a U.S. Holder will recognize taxable gain or loss on any sale or other disposition of Subordinate Voting Shares in an amount equal to the difference between the U.S. dollar value of the amount received for the Subordinate Voting Shares and the U.S. Holder's tax basis (determined in U.S. dollars) in the Subordinate Voting Shares. Generally, such gain or loss will be a capital gain or loss. Capital gains of non-corporate U.S. Holders, including individuals, derived with respect to capital assets held for more than one year are eligible for reduced rates of U.S. federal income tax. The deductibility of capital losses is subject to limitations. Such gain or loss generally will be treated as income or loss from sources within the United States for U.S. foreign tax credit limitation purposes.

Information Reporting and Backup Withholding

In general, information reporting will apply to dividends on our Subordinate Voting Shares and the proceeds of the sale or other disposition of the Subordinate Voting Shares unless a U.S. Holder is an exempt recipient, such as a corporation. Backup withholding may apply to those payments if a U.S. Holder fails to provide a taxpayer identification number and comply with certain certification procedures or otherwise fails to establish an exemption from backup withholding. If backup withholding applies, the relevant intermediary must withhold U.S. federal income tax on those payments at a rate of 28%. Any amount withheld under the backup withholding rules will be allowed as a refund or credit against a U.S. Holder's U.S. federal income tax liability, provided the required information is furnished to the IRS in a timely manner.

Passive Foreign Investment Company

We do not believe that we are, for U.S. federal income tax purposes, a PFIC, but this conclusion is a factual determination that is made annually and thus may be subject to change. If we were to be treated as a PFIC for any taxable year during which a U.S. Holder held the Subordinate Voting Shares, unless a U.S. Holder elects to be taxed annually on a mark-to-market basis with respect to the Subordinate Voting Shares, gain recognized on the sale or other disposition of the Subordinate Voting Shares would in general not be treated as capital gain. Instead, a U.S. Holder would be treated as if the U.S. Holder had recognized such gain and certain excess distributions ratably over the U.S. Holder's holding period for the Subordinate Voting Shares and would be taxed at the highest tax rate in effect for each such year to which the gain was allocated, together with a special interest charge in respect of the tax attributable to each such year. U.S. Holders should consult their own tax advisors with respect to how the PFIC rules could affect their tax situation.

Controlled Foreign Corporation

Generally, subpart F of the Code requires certain U.S. shareholders of a non-U.S. corporation to currently recognize their pro rata share of certain income generated by the non-U.S. corporation

Table of Contents

(subpart F income). These non-U.S. corporations are referred to as controlled foreign corporations (CFCs). However, with respect to a non-U.S. corporation treated as an insurance company, special rules apply for purposes of applying subpart F to related person insurance income (RPII). RPII is insurance income with respect to which the person insured is any U.S. person (or is a person related to such person) who owns stock of the non-U.S. corporation. A non-U.S. insurance corporation will qualify as a CFC if 25% or more of the non-U.S. corporation's stock (by vote and value) is owned by U.S. persons (or persons related to such persons). Exceptions apply if (a) less than 20% (by vote and value) of the non-U.S. corporation is owned by U.S. persons (or persons related to such person) insured by the non-U.S. corporation and (b) the non-U.S. corporation's RPII is less than 20% of its gross insurance income. We believe that we qualify for such exceptions, and will not be classified as a CFC, but there is no assurance that we will continue to qualify for such exceptions.

LEGAL MATTERS AND INTEREST OF EXPERTS

Certain legal matters relating to the securities offered by this prospectus supplement will be passed upon on our behalf by Torys LLP, with respect to matters of Canadian law, and by Shearman & Sterling LLP, with respect to matters of U.S. law. As of the date of this prospectus supplement, partners and associates of Torys LLP own, in the aggregate, less than one percent of our outstanding Subordinate Voting Shares.

AUDITORS, TRANSFER AGENT AND REGISTRAR

Our auditors are PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Chartered Accountants, Royal Trust Tower, Suite 3000, P.O. Box 82, 77 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5K 1G8.

Our transfer agent and registrar for the Subordinate Voting Shares in Canada is CIBC Mellon Trust Company at its principal office in Toronto, 320 Bay Street, P.O. Box 1, Toronto, Ontario, M5H 4A6, and in the United States is Mellon Investor Services LLC, 120 Broadway, 13th Floor, New York, New York 10271.

S-22

Table of Contents

AUDITORS' CONSENT

We have read the prospectus supplement of Fairfax Financial Holdings Limited (the "Company") dated September 27, 2005 relating to the Company's offer to sell 1,843,318 Subordinate Voting Shares, together with the accompanying short form base shelf prospectus of the Company dated January 24, 2005. We have complied with Canadian generally accepted standards for an auditor's involvement with offering documents.

We consent to the incorporation by reference in the above-mentioned prospectus supplement of our report to the shareholders of the Company relating to the consolidated balance sheets of the Company as at December 31, 2004 and 2003, the consolidated statements of earnings, retained earnings and cash flows for each of the years in the three year period ended December 31, 2004, and management's assessment of the effectiveness of internal control over financial reporting and the effectiveness of internal control over financial reporting as of December 31, 2004. Our report is dated March 4, 2005.

(Signed) PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

Chartered Accountants

Toronto, Ontario

September 27, 2005

S-23

Table of Contents

PROSPECTUS

FAIRFAX FINANCIAL HOLDINGS LIMITED

US\$750,000,000

Subordinate Voting Shares

Preferred Shares

Debt Securities

Warrants

Share Purchase Contracts

Units

We may offer from time to time, during the 25 month period that this prospectus, including any amendments hereto, remains effective, up to US\$750,000,000 of the securities listed above in one or more series or issuances and their total offering price, in the aggregate, will not exceed US\$750,000,000. Our securities may be offered separately or together, in amounts, at prices and on terms to be determined based on market conditions and set forth in an accompanying shelf prospectus supplement.

We will provide the specific terms of any securities we actually offer in supplements to this prospectus. You should read this prospectus and any applicable prospectus supplement carefully before you invest. This prospectus may not be used to offer securities unless accompanied by a prospectus supplement. Any net proceeds we expect to receive from the issue of our securities will be set forth in a prospectus supplement.

Our outstanding Subordinate Voting Shares are listed for trading on the Toronto Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol FFH.

Investing in our securities involves risks. See Risk Factors.

We are permitted to prepare this prospectus in accordance with Canadian disclosure requirements, which are different from those of the United States. We prepare our financial statements in accordance with Canadian generally accepted accounting principles, and are subject to Canadian auditing and auditor independence standards. Our financial statements may not be comparable to financial statements of U.S. companies.

Owning the securities may subject you to tax consequences both in the United States and Canada. This prospectus or any applicable prospectus supplement may not describe these tax consequences fully. You should read the tax discussion in any applicable prospectus supplement.

Your ability to enforce civil liabilities under the U.S. federal securities laws may be affected adversely because we are incorporated in Canada, most of our officers and directors and certain of the experts named in this prospectus are Canadian residents, and many of our assets are located in Canada.

Neither the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission nor any state or provincial securities regulator has approved or disapproved of these securities or determined if this prospectus is truthful or complete. Any representation to the contrary is a criminal offense.

January 24, 2005

Table of Contents**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Enforceability of Certain Civil Liabilities	2
Presentation of Our Financial Information	2
Exchange Rate Data	3
Forward-Looking Statements	3
The Company	5
Risk Factors	6
Use of Proceeds	15
Insurance Regulatory Matters	15
Description of Debt Securities	24
Description of Subordinate Voting Shares and Preferred Shares	37
Description of Warrants	41
Description of Share Purchase Contracts	43
Description of Units	44
Plan of Distribution	45
Earnings Coverage Ratios	46
Certain Income Tax Considerations	47
Documents Incorporated by Reference	48
Legal Matters	49
Experts	49
Auditors, Transfer Agent and Registrar	49
List of Documents Filed with the SEC	50
Auditors' Consent	51

You should rely only on the information contained in or incorporated by reference into this prospectus or any prospectus supplement. References to this prospectus include documents incorporated by reference therein. See Documents Incorporated by Reference. The information in or incorporated by reference into this prospectus is current only as of its date. We have not authorized anyone to provide you with information that is different. This document may only be used where it is legal to offer these securities.

ENFORCEABILITY OF CERTAIN CIVIL LIABILITIES

We are a corporation organized under the laws of Canada and some of our assets are located in, and most of our directors and most of our officers are residents of, Canada. As a result, it may be difficult for U.S. investors to effect service of process within the United States upon our directors or officers, or to realize in the United States upon judgments of courts of the United States predicated upon civil liability of such directors or officers under U.S. federal securities laws. We have been advised by Torys LLP, our Canadian counsel, that a judgment of a U.S. court predicated solely upon civil liability under such laws would probably be enforceable in Canada if the U.S. court in which the judgment was obtained had a basis for jurisdiction in the matter that was recognized by a Canadian court for such purposes. We have also been advised by such counsel, however, that there is substantial doubt whether an action could be brought in Canada in the first instance on the basis of liability predicated solely upon such laws.

PRESENTATION OF OUR FINANCIAL INFORMATION

As the majority of our operations are in the United States or conducted in U.S. dollars, effective December 31, 2003, we report our consolidated financial statements in U.S. dollars in order to provide more meaningful information to users of our financial statements. Unless otherwise indicated, comparative historical financial information contained in this prospectus and in our audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2003, our unaudited interim consolidated financial statements for the nine months ended September 30, 2004, and our management's discussion and analysis for such financial statements, each incorporated by reference herein, has been restated in U.S. dollars based on currency exchange rates in effect during the period being restated. In this prospectus, except where otherwise indicated, all dollar amounts are expressed in U.S. dollars, references to \$, US\$ and dollars are to U.S. dollars, and references to Cdn\$ are to Canadian dollars.

Our consolidated financial statements have been prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles in Canada, or Canadian GAAP, which differ from generally accepted accounting principles in the United States, or U.S. GAAP. For a discussion of the

material differences between Canadian GAAP and U.S. GAAP as they relate to our financial statements, see note 19 to our audited

Table of Contents

consolidated financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2003 and note 7 to our unaudited interim consolidated financial statements for the nine months ended September 30, 2004, incorporated by reference in this prospectus.

EXCHANGE RATE DATA

The following table sets forth, for each period indicated, the low and high exchange rates for Canadian dollars expressed in United States dollars, the exchange rate at the end of such period and the average of such exchange rates for each day during such period, based on the inverse of the noon buying rate in The City of New York for cable transfers in Canadian dollars as certified for customs purposes by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York:

	Year Ended December 31,				
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Low	0.6410	0.6241	0.6200	0.6349	0.7158
High	0.6969	0.6697	0.6619	0.7738	0.8493
Period End	0.6669	0.6279	0.6329	0.7738	0.8310
Average	0.6732	0.6457	0.6368	0.7136	0.7696

On January 21, 2005, the inverse of the noon buying rate was \$0.8189 = Cdn\$1.00.

FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

Any statements made by us or on our behalf may include forward-looking statements that reflect our current views with respect to future events and financial performance. The words believe, anticipate, project, expect, plan, intend, predict, estimate, will likely result, will continue and similar expressions identify forward-looking statements. These forward-looking statements relate to, among other things, our plans and objectives for future operations and underwriting profits. We caution readers not to place undue reliance on these forward-looking statements, which speak only as of their dates. We are under no obligation to update or alter such forward-looking statements as a result of new information, future events or otherwise. These forward-looking statements are subject to uncertainties and other factors that could cause actual results to differ materially from such statements. These uncertainties and other factors, which we describe in more detail elsewhere in this prospectus, or in documents incorporated by reference herein, include, but are not limited to:

- a reduction in net income if our loss reserves are insufficient;
- underwriting losses on the risks we insure that are higher or lower than expected;
- insufficient reserves for asbestos, environmental and other latent claims;
- the lowering or loss of one of our subsidiaries' financial or claims-paying ability ratings;
- an inability to realize our investment objectives;
- changes in economic conditions, including interest rates and the securities markets, which could affect our investment portfolio;
- exposure to credit risk in the event our reinsurers fail to make payments to us under our reinsurance arrangements;
- exposure to credit risk in the event our insureds fail to pay premiums that are owed to us or fail to reimburse us for deductibles that are paid by us on their behalf;
- the occurrence of catastrophic events with a frequency or severity exceeding our estimates;

a decrease in the level of demand for our subsidiaries' reinsurance or insurance products, or increased competition in the insurance industry;

Table of Contents

the cycle of the insurance market, which can determine our and our competitors' premium rates and capacity to write new business;

our inability to obtain reinsurance coverage at reasonable prices or on terms that adequately protect us;

the timing of loss payments being faster or the receipt of reinsurance recoverables being slower than anticipated by us;

our dependence on independent brokers over whom we exercise little control;

adverse fluctuations in foreign currency exchange rates;

assessments and shared market mechanisms which can adversely affect our U.S. insurance subsidiaries;

our failure to realize future income tax assets;

loss of key employees;

the influence exercisable by our controlling shareholder;

the passage of legislation subjecting our businesses to additional supervision or regulation, including additional tax regulation, in the United States, Canada or other jurisdictions in which we operate;

our inability to obtain required levels of capital on favorable terms, if at all;

our inability to access our subsidiaries' cash;

risks associated with current government investigations of, and class action litigation related to, insurance industry practices;

the failure of any of the loss limitation methods we employ;

an impairment in the value of our goodwill; and

risks associated with implementing our business strategies.

See "Risk Factors" for a further discussion of these risks and uncertainties.

Table of Contents

THE COMPANY

Unless the context otherwise requires, the terms Fairfax , Company , we , us and our refer to Fairfax Financial Holdings Limited and its subsidiaries; the term OdysseyRe refers to our public reinsurance business, Odyssey Re Holdings Corp. and its subsidiaries; the term Crum & Forster refers to our wholly-owned U.S. property and casualty insurance business, Crum & Forster Holdings Corp. and its subsidiaries; the term Northbridge refers to our public Canadian property and casualty insurance business, Northbridge Financial Corporation and its subsidiaries; the term Hamblin Watsa refers to our wholly-owned investment management subsidiary, Hamblin Watsa Investment Counsel Ltd.; and the term Lindsey Morden refers to our claims adjusting subsidiary, Lindsey Morden Group Inc. and its subsidiaries. All references in this prospectus to \$, US\$ or dollars refer to United States dollars and all references to Cdn\$ refer to Canadian dollars, unless otherwise indicated.

We are a financial services holding company primarily engaged in property and casualty insurance and reinsurance. We are incorporated under the *Canada Business Corporations Act*. We operate through a decentralized operating structure, with autonomous management teams applying a focused underwriting strategy to our markets. We seek to differentiate ourselves by combining disciplined underwriting with the investment of our assets on a total return basis, which we believe provides above-average returns over the long-term. We provide a full range of property and casualty products, maintaining a diversified portfolio of risks across classes of business, geographic regions, and types of insureds. We have been under current management since September 1985. Our principal executive offices are located at 95 Wellington Street West, Suite 800, Toronto, Ontario, M5J 2N7, Canada. Our telephone number is (416) 367-4941.

We conduct our business through the following segments, with each of our continuing operations maintaining a strong position in its respective markets.

Our reinsurance business is conducted through OdysseyRe, a U.S.-based underwriter of a full range of property and casualty reinsurance on a worldwide basis. We have an 80.8% interest in OdysseyRe, whose common stock is traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol ORH.

Our U.S. insurance business provides a full range of commercial property and casualty insurance, principally through Crum & Forster, a national carrier which targets specialty classes of business that emphasize strong technical underwriting expertise. We own all of the equity of Crum & Forster.

Our Canadian insurance business is conducted principally through Northbridge, which provides commercial and personal lines property and casualty insurance in Canada through a wide range of distribution channels. We have a majority interest in Northbridge, whose common shares are traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange under the symbol NB.

Our runoff business primarily includes our discontinued business that did not meet our underwriting criteria or strategic objectives and selected business previously written by our other subsidiaries that was put under dedicated runoff management. In addition, our runoff segment also includes third-party runoff operations that we have acquired, which we believe will provide us with the opportunity to earn attractive returns on our invested capital.

Our invested assets are managed by our wholly-owned investment management subsidiary, Hamblin Watsa. Hamblin Watsa has managed our invested assets since September 1985 and emphasizes a conservative investment philosophy, seeking to invest our assets on a total return basis, which includes realized and unrealized gains over the long-term, using a value-oriented approach.

Table of Contents

RISK FACTORS

An investment in our securities involves risk. You should carefully consider the following risk factors, as well as the other information contained in and incorporated by reference into this prospectus, before deciding whether to invest in our securities. Any of the following risks could materially adversely affect our business, financial condition or results of operations. Additional risks and uncertainties not currently known to us or that we currently deem to be immaterial may also materially and adversely affect our business, financial condition or results of operations.

Overview

We operate with a holding company structure. The holding company controls our operating insurance and reinsurance companies, each of which must comply with applicable insurance regulations of the jurisdictions in which it operates. Each company must maintain reserves for losses and loss adjustment expenses to cover the risks it has underwritten. The reserves of one of our insurance or reinsurance companies are not available to be applied against the risks underwritten by other of our companies. The financial condition and results of operations of each of the insurance and reinsurance companies we control are included in our consolidated financial statements and, generally, losses incurred by any of our companies directly impact our consolidated results. Although a severe loss incurred by one company should not have any adverse effect on any of our other companies, such loss, even though not material to us when our financial condition is viewed as a whole, could have an adverse effect on us because it could affect adversely how our other companies are treated by others, including rating agencies and insurance regulators.

If our actual claims exceed our claim reserves, our financial condition and results of operations could be adversely affected.

We maintain reserves to cover our estimated ultimate unpaid liability for losses and loss adjustment expenses with respect to reported and unreported claims incurred as of the end of each accounting period. Our success is dependent upon our ability to accurately assess the risks associated with the businesses that we reinsure or insure. If we fail to accurately assess the risks we assume, we may fail to establish appropriate premium rates and our reserves may be inadequate to cover our losses, which could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition and reduce our net income.

At December 31, 2003, we had net unpaid loss and loss adjustment expense reserves of approximately \$6.9 billion. We incurred losses and loss adjustment expenses of \$3.0, \$2.9 and \$2.7 billion for the years ended December 31, 2003, 2002 and 2001, respectively.

Reserves do not represent an exact calculation of liability, but instead represent estimates involving actuarial and statistical projections at a given point in time of our expectations of the ultimate settlement and administration costs of claims incurred. Establishing an appropriate level of claim reserves is an inherently uncertain process. We utilize both proprietary and commercially available actuarial models, as well as historical insurance industry loss development patterns, to assist in the establishment of appropriate claim reserves.

In contrast to casualty losses, which frequently can be determined only through lengthy and unpredictable litigation, non-casualty property losses tend to be reported promptly and usually are settled within a shorter period of time. Nevertheless, for both casualty and property losses, actual claims and claim expenses paid may deviate, perhaps substantially, from the reserve estimates reflected in our financial statements. Variables in the reserve estimation process can be affected by both internal and external events, such as changes in claims handling procedures, economic inflation, legal trends and legislative changes. Many of these items are not directly quantifiable, particularly on a prospective basis.

If our claim reserves are determined to be inadequate, we will be required to increase claim reserves with a corresponding reduction in our net income in the period in which the deficiency is rectified. It is possible that claims in respect of events that have occurred could exceed our claim reserves and have a

Table of Contents

material adverse effect on our results of operations in a particular period and/or our financial condition. For the year ended December 31, 2003, we increased our loss and loss adjustment expense reserves relating to prior periods by \$456.3 million (before recovery under the Swiss Re Cover, described in our management's discussion and analysis for the year ended December 31, 2003, which is incorporated by reference into this prospectus), primarily relating to runoff business and asbestos claims.

Even though most insurance contracts have policy limits, the nature of property and casualty insurance and reinsurance is such that losses can exceed policy limits for a variety of reasons and could very significantly exceed the premiums received on the underlying policies. When this occurs, our financial results are adversely affected.

Our business could be harmed because of our potential exposure for asbestos, environmental and other latent claims.

We have established loss reserves for asbestos and environmental and other latent claims. There is a high degree of uncertainty with respect to future exposure from such claims because of: significant issues surrounding the liabilities of the insurers, including us; risks inherent in major litigation, including more aggressive environmental and asbestos-related litigation against insurers, including us; and diverging legal interpretations and judgments in different jurisdictions. These uncertainties include, among other things:

the extent of coverage under insurance policies;

whether or not particular claims are subject to an aggregate limit;

the number of occurrences involved in particular claims; and

new theories of insured and insurer liability.

In addition, insurers generally, including us, are experiencing an increase in the number of asbestos-related claims due to, among other things, more intensive advertising by lawyers seeking asbestos claimants, the increasing focus by plaintiffs on new and previously peripheral defendants and an increase in the number of entities seeking bankruptcy protection as a result of asbestos-related liabilities. In addition to contributing to the increase in claims, such bankruptcy proceedings may have the effect of significantly accelerating and increasing loss payments by insurers, including us.

Increasingly, policyholders have been asserting that their claims for asbestos-related insurance are not subject to aggregate limits on coverage and that each individual bodily injury claim should be treated as a separate occurrence under the policy. We expect this trend to continue. Although it is difficult to predict whether these policyholders will be successful on either of these issues, to the extent either issue is resolved in their favor, our coverage obligations under the policies at issue would be materially increased and bounded only by the applicable per occurrence limits and the number of asbestos bodily injury claims made by the policyholders. Accordingly, it is difficult to predict the ultimate size of the claims for coverage not subject to aggregate limits.

In addition, proceedings have recently been launched directly against insurers, including us, challenging insurers' conduct in respect of asbestos claims, including in some cases with respect to previous settlements. Some plaintiffs have also advanced claims against us as defendants in asbestos personal injury cases that are close to trial. We anticipate the filing of other direct actions against insurers, including us, in the future. Particularly in light of jurisdictional issues, it is difficult to predict the outcome of these proceedings, including whether the plaintiffs will be able to sustain these actions against insurers based on novel legal theories of liability.

Similarly, as a result of various regulatory efforts aimed at environmental remediation, companies in the insurance industry, including us, continue to be involved in litigation involving policy coverage and liability issues with respect to environmental claims. In addition to regulatory pressures, the results of court decisions affecting the industry's coverage positions continue to be inconsistent and have expanded coverage beyond its original intent. Accordingly, the ultimate responsibility and liability for environmental remediation costs remains uncertain.

Table of Contents

Given the factors described above, it is not presently possible to quantify with a high degree of certainty the ultimate exposure or range of exposure represented by asbestos, environmental and other latent claims and related litigation. We have established reserves that represent our best estimate of ultimate claims and claim adjustment expenses based upon known facts and current law. Our gross asbestos reserves were \$1.6 billion at December 31, 2003 and our gross reserves for environmental and other latent claims were \$722.2 million. Our asbestos reserves, net of reinsurance but excluding vendor indemnities, were \$772.2 million at December 31, 2003 and our reserves for environmental and other latent claims, net of reinsurance but excluding vendor indemnities, were \$307.9 million. However, these claims and related litigation, particularly if current trends continue, could result in liability exceeding these reserves by an amount that could be material to our operating results and financial condition in future periods.

If our insurance and reinsurance subsidiaries are unable to maintain favorable financial strength ratings, it may be more difficult for them to maintain or write new business.

Third-party rating agencies assess and rate the claims-paying ability of reinsurers and insurers based upon the criteria of such rating agencies. Periodically the rating agencies evaluate our insurance companies to confirm that they continue to meet the criteria of the ratings previously assigned to them. The claims-paying ability ratings assigned by rating agencies to reinsurance or insurance companies represent independent opinions of financial strength and ability to meet policyholder obligations, and are not directed toward the protection of investors. Ratings by rating agencies are not ratings of securities or recommendations to buy, hold or sell any security and are not applicable to the securities offered by this prospectus.

A.M. Best has assigned an A rating (the third highest of fifteen ratings) to OdysseyRe, and an A rating (the fourth highest of fifteen ratings) to each of Crum & Forster and Northbridge. Financial strength ratings are used by insurers and reinsurance and insurance intermediaries as an important means of assessing the financial strength and quality of insurers and reinsurers. Concerns about our liquidity have caused the agencies to place negative outlooks on our insurance subsidiaries, which could negatively impact their ability to write new business. A downgrade in these ratings could lead to a significant reduction in the number of insurance policies our insurance subsidiaries write.

If we are unable to realize our investment objectives, our business, financial condition or results of operations may be adversely affected.

Investment returns are an important part of our overall profitability and our operating results depend in part on the performance of our investment portfolio. Accordingly, fluctuations in the fixed income or equity markets could impair our profitability, financial condition or cash flows. We derive our investment income from interest and dividends, together with realized gains on the sale of investment assets. The portion derived from realized gains generally fluctuates from year to year. For the years ended December 31, 2003, 2002 and 2001, net realized gains accounted for approximately 71.9%, 52.9% and 19.3%, respectively, of our total investment income (including realized gains and losses). Realized gains are typically a less predictable source of investment income than interest and dividends, particularly in the short term.

The return on our portfolio and the risks associated with our investments are also affected by our asset mix, which can change materially depending on market conditions. Investments in cash or short term investments generally produce a lower return than other investments. At December 31, 2003, 47%, or \$5.7 billion, of our invested assets were held in cash and short term investments pending our identifying suitable opportunities for reinvestment in line with our long-term value-oriented investment philosophy.

The volatility of our claims submissions may force us to liquidate securities, which may cause us to incur capital losses. If we structure our investments improperly relative to our liabilities, we may be forced to liquidate investments prior to maturity at a significant loss to cover such liabilities. Realized and

Table of Contents

unrealized investment losses resulting from an other than temporary decline in value could significantly decrease our assets, thereby affecting our ability to conduct business.

The ability to achieve our investment objectives is affected by general economic conditions that are beyond our control. General economic conditions can adversely affect the markets for interest-rate-sensitive securities, including the extent and timing of investor participation in such markets, the level and volatility of interest rates and, consequently, the value of fixed income securities. Interest rates are highly sensitive to many factors, including governmental monetary policies, domestic and international economic and political conditions and other factors beyond our control. General economic conditions, stock market conditions and many other factors can also adversely affect the equities markets and, consequently, the value of the equity securities we own. In addition, defaults by third parties who fail to pay or perform on their obligations could reduce our investment income and realized investment gains or result in investment losses. We may not be able to realize our investment objectives, which could reduce our net income significantly and adversely affect our business, financial condition or results of operations.

We cannot assure you that our reinsurers and certain insureds will pay us on a timely basis or at all.

Although reinsurance makes the assuming reinsurer liable to us to the extent of the risk ceded, we are not relieved of our primary liability to our insureds. As of December 31, 2003, we had a total of \$8.5 billion recoverable from reinsurers. We cannot assure you that our reinsurers will pay our reinsurance claims on a timely basis or at all. As well, we bear credit risk with respect to our reinsurers (including retrocessionaires), both with respect to receivables reflected on our balance sheet as well as to contingent liabilities with respect to reinsurance protection on future claims. If reinsurers are unwilling or unable to pay us amounts due under reinsurance contracts, we will incur unexpected losses and our cash flow will be adversely affected.

We write certain insurance policies, such as large deductible policies (policies where the insured retains a specific amount of any potential loss), in which the insured must reimburse us for certain losses. Accordingly, we bear credit risk on these policies and cannot assure you that our insureds will pay us on a timely basis or at all. In the ordinary course of business we are sometimes unable to collect all amounts billed to insureds, generally due to disputes on audit of retrospectively rated policies and, in some cases, due to insureds having filed for bankruptcy protection. In addition, if an insured files for bankruptcy, we may be unable to recover on assets such insured may have pledged to us as collateral. We reserve for uncollectible amounts in the period the collection issues become known. The inability to collect amounts due to us reduces our net income and cash flow, and the ability of our insurance and reinsurance subsidiaries to pay dividends or make other distributions to us.

Unpredictable catastrophic events could reduce our net income.

Our insurance and reinsurance operations expose us to claims arising out of catastrophes. We have experienced, and will in the future experience, catastrophe losses which may materially reduce our profitability or harm our financial condition. Catastrophes can be caused by various events, including natural events such as hurricanes, windstorms, earthquakes, hailstorms, severe winter weather and fires, and unnatural events such as terrorist attacks and riots. The incidence and severity of catastrophes are inherently unpredictable.

The extent of losses from a catastrophe is a function of both the total amount of insured exposure in the area affected by the event and the severity of the event. Most catastrophes are restricted to small geographic areas; however, hurricanes, windstorms and earthquakes may produce significant damage in large, heavily populated areas, and most of our past natural catastrophe-related claims have resulted from severe storms. Catastrophes can cause losses in a variety of property and casualty lines. For example, the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 caused losses in several of our lines, including property and liability. It is possible that a catastrophic event or multiple catastrophic events could have a material adverse effect upon our net income and financial condition.

Table of Contents

Claims resulting from natural or man-made catastrophic events could cause substantial volatility in our financial results for any fiscal quarter or year and could materially reduce our profitability or harm our financial condition. Our ability to write new business could also be affected. We believe that increases in the value and geographic concentration of insured property and the effects of inflation could increase the severity of claims from catastrophic events in the future. In addition, states have from time to time passed legislation that has the effect of limiting the ability of insurers to manage catastrophe risk, such as legislation prohibiting insurers from withdrawing from catastrophe-prone areas.

The cycles of the insurance and reinsurance industries may cause fluctuations in our results.

Historically, we have experienced fluctuations in operating results due to competition, frequency of occurrence or severity of catastrophic events, levels of capacity, general economic conditions and other factors. Demand for insurance and reinsurance is influenced significantly by underwriting results of primary insurers and prevailing general economic conditions.

The property and casualty insurance business historically has been characterized by periods of intense price competition due to excess underwriting capacity, as well as periods when shortages of underwriting capacity have permitted attractive premium levels. We expect to continue to experience the effects of this cyclical, which, during down periods, could harm our financial condition, profitability or cash flows.

In the reinsurance industry, the supply of reinsurance is related to prevailing prices and levels of surplus capacity that, in turn, may fluctuate in response to changes in rates of return being realized. It is possible that premium rates or other terms and conditions of trade could vary in the future, that the present level of demand will not continue because the larger insurers created by the consolidation discussed below may require less reinsurance or that the present level of supply of reinsurance could increase as a result of capital provided by recent or future market entrants or by existing reinsurers. If any of these events transpire, our results of operations in our reinsurance business could be adversely affected.

We operate in a highly competitive environment which could make it more difficult for us to attract and retain business.

The property and casualty insurance industry and the reinsurance industry are both highly competitive, and we believe that they will remain highly competitive in the foreseeable future. Competition in our industry is based on many factors, including premiums charged and other terms and conditions offered, products and services provided, financial ratings assigned by independent rating agencies, speed of claims payment, reputation, selling effort, perceived financial strength and the experience of the insurer or reinsurer in the line of insurance or reinsurance to be written. We compete, and will continue to compete, with major U.S. and non-U.S. insurers and reinsurers, as well as certain underwriting syndicates, some of which have greater financial, marketing and management resources than we do, and there is no assurance that we will be able to successfully retain or attract business.

Since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, a number of new insurers and reinsurers have been formed to compete in our industry, and a number of existing market participants have raised new capital which may enhance their ability to compete. In addition, we may not be aware of other companies that may be planning to enter our industry or existing participants that may be planning to raise additional capital. In addition, we have recently seen the creation of alternative products from capital market participants that are intended to compete with insurance and reinsurance products. We are unable to predict the extent to which these initiatives may affect the demand for our products, our premium volume or the risks that may be available for us to consider underwriting. Such increased competition could cause us and certain of our competitors to charge lower premium rates and obtain less favorable policy terms, which could adversely affect our ability to generate revenue and grow our business. Further, our plans for our business units could be adversely impacted by the loss of business to competitors offering competitive insurance products at lower prices, which would have an adverse effect on our results of operations.

Many insurance industry participants are consolidating to enhance their market power. These entities may try to use their market power to negotiate price reductions for our products and services. If

Table of Contents

competitive pressures compel us to reduce our prices, our operating margins would decrease. As the insurance industry consolidates, competition for customers will become more intense and the importance of acquiring and properly servicing each customer will become greater. We could incur greater expenses relating to customer acquisition and retention, further reducing our operating margins. In addition, insurance companies that merge may be able to spread their risks across a larger capital base so that they require less reinsurance.

We may be unable to obtain reinsurance coverage at reasonable prices or on terms that adequately protect us.

We use reinsurance arrangements, including reinsurance agreements with reinsurers, referred to as retrocessionaires, to help manage our exposure to property and casualty risks. The availability and cost of reinsurance are subject to prevailing market conditions, both in terms of price and available capacity, which can affect our business volume and profitability. Many reinsurance companies have begun to exclude certain coverages from, or alter terms in, the policies that we purchase from them. Some exclusions are with respect to risks which we cannot exclude in policies we write due to business or regulatory constraints, such as coverage with respect to acts of terrorism, mold and cyber risk. In addition, reinsurers are imposing terms, such as lower per occurrence and aggregate limits, on primary insurers that are inconsistent with corresponding terms in the policies written by these primary insurers. As a result, our insurance subsidiaries, like other primary insurance companies, increasingly are writing insurance policies which to some extent do not have the benefit of reinsurance protection. These gaps in reinsurance protection expose us to greater risk and greater potential losses. In the future, we may not be able successfully to alleviate risk through reinsurance arrangements.

In addition, although our current reinsurance program is primarily maintained with reinsurers rated A (Excellent) or better by A.M. Best, a reinsurer's insolvency or inability or unwillingness to make timely payments under the terms of its reinsurance agreements with us could have a material adverse effect on us.

We rely on independent brokers over whom we exercise little control, which exposes us to certain risks.

We do business with a large number of independent brokers on a non-exclusive basis and we cannot rely on their commitment to our insurance products. Moreover, in some markets we operate pursuant to open market arrangements in which we have no formal relationships with brokers who place our risk in these markets.

Because the majority of our brokers are independent, we have only limited ability to exercise control over them. In the event that an independent broker exceeds its authority by binding us on a risk which does not comply with our underwriting guidelines, we may be at risk for that policy until we receive the application and effect a cancellation. Although to date we have not experienced a material loss from improper use of binding authority of our brokers, any improper use of such authority may result in losses that could have a material adverse effect on our business, results of operations and financial condition.

In accordance with industry practice, our customers often pay the premiums for their policies to brokers for payment over to us. These premiums are considered paid when received by the broker and, thereafter, the customer is no longer liable to us for those amounts, whether or not we have actually received the premiums from the broker. Consequently, we assume a degree of credit risk associated with our reliance on brokers in connection with the settlement of insurance balances.

Further, as is customary in the reinsurance industry, OdysseyRe frequently pays amounts owing in respect of claims under its policies to reinsurance brokers, for payment over to the ceding insurers. In the event that a broker fails to make such a payment, depending on the jurisdiction, OdysseyRe might remain liable to the ceding insurer for the deficiency. Conversely, in certain jurisdictions, when the ceding insurer pays premiums for such policies to reinsurance brokers for payment over to OdysseyRe, such premiums will be deemed to have been paid and the ceding insurer will no longer be liable for those amounts, whether or not OdysseyRe has actually received such premiums. Consequently, in connection with the

Table of Contents

settlement of reinsurance balances, we assume a degree of credit risk associated with brokers around the world.

Assessments and other surcharges for guaranty funds and second-injury funds and other mandatory pooling arrangements may reduce the profitability of our U.S. insurance subsidiaries.

Virtually all states require insurers licensed to do business in their state to bear a portion of the loss suffered by some insureds as the result of impaired or insolvent insurance companies. These obligations are funded by assessments that are expected to increase in the future as a result of recent insolvencies. Many states also have laws that establish second-injury funds to provide compensation to injured employees for aggravation of a prior condition or injury, which are funded by either assessments based on paid losses or premium surcharge mechanisms. In addition, as a condition to the ability to conduct business in various jurisdictions, our insurance subsidiaries are required to participate in mandatory property and casualty shared market mechanisms or pooling arrangements, which provide various types of insurance coverage to individuals or other entities that otherwise are unable to purchase that coverage from private insurers. The effect of these assessments and mandatory shared-market mechanisms or changes in them could reduce the profitability of our U.S. insurance subsidiaries in any given period or limit their ability to grow their business.

We may be adversely affected by foreign currency fluctuations.

Our functional currency is the U.S. dollar. A portion of our premiums are written in currencies other than the U.S. dollar and a portion of our assets (including investments) and loss reserves are also in foreign currencies. We may, from time to time, experience losses resulting from fluctuations in the values of foreign currencies (including when our foreign currency assets and liabilities are hedged) which could adversely affect our operating results.

Our failure to realize future income tax assets could lead to a writedown, which could adversely affect our results of operations.

Realization of the future income tax asset is dependent upon the generation of taxable income in those jurisdictions where the relevant tax losses and other timing differences exist. The major component of our future income tax asset of \$968.3 million at December 31, 2003 is \$676.4 million relating to our U.S. consolidated tax group. Failure to achieve projected levels of profitability for our U.S. operations could lead to a writedown in this future tax asset if the recovery period becomes longer than expected.

Our business could be adversely affected by the loss of one or more key employees.

We are substantially dependent on a small number of key employees, including our Chairman and controlling shareholder, Mr. Prem Watsa, and the senior managers of our operating subsidiaries. We believe that the experiences and reputations in our industry of these individuals are important factors in our ability to attract new business. At the subsidiary level, we have entered into employment agreements with our key employees. Our success has been, and will continue to be, dependent on our ability to retain the services of our existing key employees and to attract and retain additional qualified personnel in the future. The loss of the services of any of these key employees, or the inability to identify, hire and retain other highly qualified personnel in the future, could adversely affect the quality and profitability of our business operations. We do not currently maintain key employee insurance with respect to any of our employees.

Our controlling shareholder may substantially influence our direction and operations.

Mr. Prem Watsa, our Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, owns, directly or indirectly, or exercises control or direction over shares representing 51.2% of the voting power of our outstanding shares. Mr. Watsa has the ability to control certain actions requiring shareholder approval, including approving a merger or consolidation, liquidation or sale of our assets, electing members of our board of directors and

Table of Contents

adopting amendments to our articles of incorporation and by-laws. As a shareholder, Mr. Watsa may have different interests than you have and therefore may make decisions that are adverse to your interests.

Our operations could be adversely affected as a result of regulatory, political, economic or other influences in the insurance and reinsurance industries.

The insurance and reinsurance industries are highly regulated and are subject to changing political, economic and regulatory influences. These factors affect the practices and operation of insurance and reinsurance organizations. Federal, state and provincial legislatures in the United States and Canada, as well as governments in foreign jurisdictions in which we do business, have periodically considered programs to reform or amend the insurance systems at both the federal and local levels.

Changes in current insurance regulations may include increased governmental involvement in the insurance industry or may otherwise change the business and economic environment in which insurance industry participants operate. In the United States, for example, the states of Hawaii and Florida have implemented arrangements whereby property insurance in catastrophe prone areas is provided through state-sponsored entities. The California Earthquake Authority, the first privately financed, publicly operated residential earthquake insurance pool, provides earthquake insurance to California homeowners.

Such changes could adversely affect our subsidiaries' financial results, including their ability to pay dividends, cause us to make unplanned modifications of products or services, or result in delays or cancellations of sales of products and services by insurers or reinsurers. Insurance industry participants may respond to changes by reducing their investments or postponing investment decisions, including investments in our products and services. We cannot predict the future impact of changing law or regulation on our operations; any changes could have a material adverse effect on us or the insurance industry in general.

As industry practices and legal, judicial, social and other environmental conditions change, unexpected and unintended issues related to claims and coverage may emerge. These issues can have a negative effect on our business by either extending coverage beyond our underwriting intent or by increasing the number or size of claims. Recent examples of emerging claims and coverage issues include:

increases in the number and size of water damage claims related to expenses for testing and remediation of mold conditions;

increases in the number and size of claims relating to construction defects, which often present complex coverage and damage valuation questions;

changes in interpretation of the named insured provision with respect to the uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage in commercial automobile policies; and

a growing trend in the United States of plaintiffs targeting property and casualty insurers in purported class action litigation relating to claim-handling and other practices, particularly with respect to the handling of personal lines automobile and homeowners claims.

The effects of these and other unforeseen emerging claims and coverage issues are extremely hard to predict and could harm our business.

Our inability to obtain additional capital in the future as required could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition.

Our future capital requirements depend on many factors, including our ability to write new business successfully and to establish premium rates and reserves at levels sufficient to cover losses. To the extent that the funds generated by our business are insufficient to fund future operations, we may need to raise additional funds through equity or debt financings. Any equity or debt financing, if available at all, may be on terms that are not favorable to us. The cost and availability of debt financing is affected by credit ratings. Our senior debt at the holding company level is rated BB with stable outlook by Standard & Poor's (the 12th of 22 rating categories) and Ba3 with stable outlook by Moody's (the 13th of 21 rating

Table of Contents

categories). Our ability to raise additional capital may be adversely affected by our credit ratings. If we cannot obtain adequate capital or if we fail to refinance our existing debt as it comes due, our business, operating results and financial condition could be adversely affected.

We are a holding company, and we may not have access to the cash that is needed to meet our financial obligations.

We are a holding company and conduct substantially all our business through our subsidiaries and receive substantially all our earnings from them. Therefore, in the event of the insolvency or liquidation of a subsidiary, following payment by such subsidiary of its liabilities, the subsidiary may not have sufficient remaining assets to make payments to us as a shareholder or otherwise. In the event of a default by a subsidiary under our credit agreement or other indebtedness, its creditors could accelerate the debt, prior to such subsidiary distributing amounts to us that we could use to make payments on our outstanding debt. In addition, if we caused a subsidiary to pay a dividend to us to make payment on our outstanding debt, and the dividend were determined to be improperly paid, holders of our outstanding debt would be required to return the payment to the subsidiary's creditors. As of December 31, 2003, our subsidiaries had approximately \$1.2 billion of indebtedness. In June 2003, we amended our bank credit agreements to provide more flexibility for our subsidiaries to incur debt without the consent of our bank lenders and our subsidiary debt may increase in the future.

Although substantially all of our operations are conducted through our subsidiaries, none of our subsidiaries is obligated to make funds available to us for payment on our outstanding debt. Accordingly, our ability to meet our financial obligations, including to make payments on our outstanding debt, is dependent on the distribution of earnings from our subsidiaries. The ability of our subsidiaries to pay dividends to us in the future will depend on their statutory surplus, on earnings and on regulatory restrictions. The ability of our subsidiaries to pay dividends or make distributions or returns of capital to us is subject to restrictions set forth in the insurance laws and regulations of Canada, the United States, Ireland and the United Kingdom and is affected by our subsidiaries' credit agreements, indentures, rating agencies, the discretion of insurance regulatory authorities and capital support agreements with our subsidiaries. No assurance can be given that some or all of our operating subsidiaries' jurisdictions will not adopt statutory provisions more restrictive than those currently in effect. Our subsidiaries may incur additional indebtedness that may severely restrict or prohibit the making of distributions, the payment of dividends or the making of loans by our subsidiaries to us. We cannot assure you that the agreements governing the current and future indebtedness of our subsidiaries will permit our subsidiaries to provide us with sufficient dividends, distributions or loans to meet our financial obligations, including to fund payments on our outstanding debt when due.

The failure of any of the loss limitation methods we employ could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition or our results of operations.

Unlike most businesses, the insurance and reinsurance business can have enormous costs that can significantly exceed the premiums received on the underlying policies. We seek to limit our loss exposure by employing a variety of policy limits and other terms and conditions and through prudent underwriting of each program written. We also seek to limit our loss exposure by geographic diversification. We cannot be sure that any of these loss limitation methods will be effective. There can be no assurance that various provisions of our policies, such as limitations or exclusions from coverage or choice of forum, will be enforceable in the manner we intend, and there is no limit to the losses that can arise from most insurance policies.

If the value of our goodwill is impaired we would be required to write down the value of such assets.

A portion of our assets is comprised of goodwill, primarily related to our claims adjusting subsidiary Lindsey Morden. We test the carrying value of goodwill and other intangible assets for impairment at least annually. Should we identify that the value of goodwill is impaired, we would be required to write down the value of such assets to their fair value. Of Lindsey Morden's goodwill of \$180.4 million at

Table of Contents

December 31, 2003, \$137.7 million was related to its United Kingdom operations. The recoverability of this goodwill is sensitive to the ability of the United Kingdom operations to meet their profit and cash flow forecasts for 2005 and future years. Failure to meet those forecasts could result in a writedown of its goodwill.

Certain business practices of the insurance industry have become the subject of investigations by government authorities and the subject of class action litigation.

In October 2004, New York State's Attorney General filed a civil lawsuit accusing one of the United States' largest insurance brokers of fraudulent behavior, including alleged participation in bid-rigging schemes and acceptance of improper payments from insurance carriers in exchange for agreeing not to shop quotes for their customers. In addition, a number of property and casualty insurance companies are also being investigated by the New York State Attorney General's office for their alleged participation in these schemes or agreements. Neither Fairfax nor our insurance subsidiaries are defendants in the civil lawsuit that the New York State Attorney General filed against the insurance broker. However, the investigation concerns an evolving area of the law, and we can give no assurance regarding its consequences for the industry or us.

Subsequent to the announcement of these actions, numerous other state attorneys general, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, individual U.S. state insurance departments and the Canadian insurance regulators have commenced investigations of insurance industry business practices, and a U.S. Congressional committee has conducted hearings on several of these issues. Also, the SEC has indicated that it is investigating the use of insurance products allegedly used to smooth earnings or otherwise to bolster reported financial results. In addition to these government investigations, class action lawsuits relating to these business practices have been filed against various members of the insurance industry. Because these governmental investigations and lawsuits continue to grow in number and spread in scope, it is not possible at this time to determine the ultimate impact upon the insurance industry and Fairfax.

Activities being investigated include participation in contingent commission structures and other agreements under which brokers receive additional commissions based upon the volume and/or profitability of business placed with an insurer. Industry operating policies and practices may be impacted by the outcome of these investigations. In addition, the negative publicity associated with these lawsuits and investigations have precipitated increased volatility in the prices of securities issued by companies throughout the insurance industry. Negative publicity may also result in increased regulation and legislative scrutiny of industry practices as well as increased litigation, which may further increase our costs of doing business and adversely affect our profitability by impeding our ability to market our products and services, requiring us to change our marketing practices, products or services and increasing the regulatory burdens under which we operate. However, we believe that our commission programs and payments to brokers and agents comply with applicable laws and regulations.

USE OF PROCEEDS

Unless we otherwise indicate in the applicable prospectus supplement, we currently intend to use the net proceeds from the sale of our securities for general corporate purposes. We may set forth additional information on the use of net proceeds from the sale of securities we offer under this prospectus in a prospectus supplement relating to the specific offering. We may, from time to time, issue debt instruments, incur additional indebtedness and issue equity securities or warrants other than through the issue of securities pursuant to this prospectus.

INSURANCE REGULATORY MATTERS

We are subject to regulation under the insurance statutes, including insurance holding company statutes, of the various jurisdictions in which our operating subsidiaries are domiciled, including by the

Table of Contents

federal, state and provincial regulators of the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. In addition, we are subject to regulation by the insurance regulators of other jurisdictions in which we, or our operating subsidiaries, do business.

United States

General

Our United States operating subsidiaries are subject to detailed regulation throughout the United States. Although there is limited federal regulation of the insurance business in the United States, each state has a comprehensive system for regulating insurers operating in that state. The laws of the various states establish supervisory agencies with broad authority to regulate, among other things, licenses to transact business, premium rates for certain coverages, trade practices, market conduct, agent licensing, policy forms, underwriting and claims practices, reserve adequacy, transactions with affiliates, and insurer solvency. Many states also regulate investment activities on the basis of quality, distribution and other quantitative criteria. Further, most states compel participation in and regulate composition of various shared market mechanisms. States have also enacted legislation that regulates insurance holding company systems, including acquisitions, dividends, the terms of affiliate transactions, and other related matters. Our United States operating subsidiaries are domiciled in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Texas and Washington.

Insurance companies are also affected by a variety of state and federal legislative and regulatory measures and judicial decisions that define and qualify the risks and benefits for which insurance is sought and provided. These include redefinitions of risk exposure in such areas as product liability, environmental damage and workers' compensation. In addition, individual state insurance departments may prevent premium rates for some classes of insureds from reflecting the level of risk assumed by the insurer for those classes. Such developments may result in adverse effects on the profitability of various lines of insurance. In some cases, these adverse effects on profitability can be minimized, when possible, through the repricing of coverages if permitted by applicable regulations, or the limitation or cessation of the affected business, which may be restricted by state law.

Most states have insurance laws requiring that property and casualty rate schedules, policy or coverage forms, and other information be filed with each such state's regulatory authority. In many cases, such rates and/or policy forms must be approved prior to use. A few states have recently considered or enacted limitations on the ability of insurers to share data used to compile rates. Such limitations have had, and are expected to have, no significant impact on us.

Insurance companies are required to file detailed annual reports with the state insurance regulators in each of the states in which they do business, and their business and accounts are subject to examination by such regulators at any time. In addition, these insurance regulators periodically examine each insurer's financial condition, adherence to statutory accounting practices, and compliance with insurance department rules and regulations, including market conduct.

Insurance Regulation Concerning Change or Acquisition of Control

The insurance regulatory codes in our operating subsidiaries' respective domiciliary states each contain similar provisions (subject to certain variations) to the effect that the acquisition of control of a domestic insurer or of any person that directly or indirectly controls a domestic insurer cannot be consummated without the prior approval of the domiciliary insurance regulator. In general, a presumption of control arises from the direct or indirect ownership, control, possession with the power to vote or possession of proxies with respect to 10% or more of the voting securities of a domestic insurer or of a person that controls a domestic insurer. A person seeking to acquire control, directly or indirectly, of a domestic insurance company or of any person controlling a domestic insurance company generally must file with the relevant insurance regulatory authority a statement relating to the acquisition of control containing certain information required by statute and published regulations and provide a copy of such statement to the domestic insurer and obtain the prior approval of such regulatory agency for the acquisition. In

Table of Contents

addition, certain state insurance laws contain provisions that require pre-acquisition notification to state agencies of a change of control of a non-domestic insurance company admitted in that state. While such pre-acquisition notification statutes do not authorize the state agency to disapprove the change of control, such statutes do authorize certain remedies, including the issuance of a cease and desist order with respect to the non-domestic admitted insurer's doing business in the state if certain conditions exist, such as undue market concentration.

Regulation of Dividends and Other Payments

We are a legal entity separate and distinct from our subsidiaries. As a holding company with no other business operations, our primary sources of cash to meet our obligations, including principal and interest payments with respect to indebtedness, are available dividends and other statutorily permitted payments, such as tax allocation payments and management and other fees, from our operating subsidiaries. Our operating subsidiaries are subject to various state statutory and regulatory restrictions, including regulatory restrictions that are imposed as a matter of administrative policy, applicable generally to any insurance company in its state of domicile, which limit the amount of dividends or distributions an insurance company may pay to its shareholders without prior regulatory approval. Ordinary dividends, for which no regulatory approval is generally required, are limited to amounts determined by formula, which varies by state. The formula typically is based on the level of statutory surplus at the end of the prior year, as well as on some measure of statutory earnings for the prior year, both as determined in accordance with Statutory Accounting Principles, SAP, which differs from Canadian and U.S. GAAP. In addition, dividends generally may be paid only out of earned surplus as defined by each state. In every case, surplus subsequent to the payment of any dividends must be reasonable in relation to an insurance company's outstanding liabilities and must be adequate to meet its financial needs.

No assurance can be given that some or all of our operating subsidiaries' domiciliary states will not adopt statutory provisions more restrictive than those currently in effect.

If insurance regulators determine that payment of a dividend or any other payments to an affiliate (such as payments under a tax-sharing agreement or payments for employee or other services) would, because of the financial condition of the paying insurance company or otherwise, result in such insurance company being in a hazardous financial condition, the regulators may prohibit such payments that would otherwise be permitted without prior approval.

Statutory Surplus and Capital

In connection with the licensing of insurance companies, an insurance regulator may limit or prohibit the writing of new business by an insurance company within its jurisdiction when, in the regulator's judgment, the insurance company is not maintaining adequate statutory surplus or capital. We do not currently anticipate that any regulator would limit the amount of new business that our operating subsidiaries may write given their current levels of statutory surplus and capital.

Risk-Based Capital

In order to enhance the regulation of insurer solvency, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) adopted risk-based capital (RBC) requirements for property and casualty insurance companies. These RBC requirements are designed to monitor capital adequacy and to raise the level of protection that statutory surplus provides for policyholders. The RBC formula measures four major areas of risk facing property and casualty insurers: (i) underwriting risk, which is the risk of errors in pricing and reserve setting; (ii) asset risk, which is the risk of asset default for fixed-income assets and loss in market value for equity assets; (iii) credit risk, which is the risk of losses from unrecoverable reinsurance and the inability of insurers to collect agents' balances; and (iv) off-balance sheet risk, which is primarily the risk created by excessive growth. The RBC formula provides a mechanism for the calculation of an insurance company's Authorized Control Level (ACL) RBC amount.

Table of Contents

The NAIC RBC model law stipulates four levels of regulatory action with the degree of regulatory intervention increasing as the ratio of surplus to RBC decreases. The initial level, the Company Action Level, requires the insurance company to submit a plan of corrective action to the relevant insurance commissioner if its surplus falls below 200% of the ACL amount (or below 250% of the ACL amount, when there has been a negative trend as defined under the model law). The next level, the Regulatory Action Level, requires the company to submit a plan of corrective action and also allows the regulator to perform an examination of the company's business and operations and issue a corrective order if the surplus falls below 150% of the ACL amount. The third level, the ACL, permits the regulator to place the company under regulatory control, including rehabilitation or liquidation, if its surplus falls below 100% of that amount. The final action level, the Mandatory Control Level, requires the insurance commissioner to place the company under regulatory control if its surplus falls below 70% of the ACL amount.

NAIC IRIS Ratios

In the 1970s, the NAIC developed a set of financial relationships or tests called the Insurance Regulatory Information System (IRIS) that was designed to facilitate early identification of companies that may warrant special attention by insurance regulatory authorities. Insurance companies submit data on an annual basis to the NAIC, which in turn analyzes the data utilizing ratios covering 12 categories of financial data with defined usual ranges for each category. An insurance company may fall out of the usual range for one or more ratios because of specific transactions that are in themselves immaterial or eliminated at the consolidated level. Generally, an insurance company may become subject to increased scrutiny if it falls outside the usual ranges on four or more of the ratios. Certain IRIS ratios of some of our operating subsidiaries fall outside of the usual ranges. In all instances where follow-up information has been requested, our responses have not resulted in additional requests or further action.

Investment Regulation

Our operating subsidiaries are subject to state laws and regulations that require diversification of investment portfolios and that limit the amount of investments in certain investment categories. Failure to comply with these laws and regulations may cause non-conforming investments to be treated as non-admitted assets for purposes of measuring statutory surplus and, in some instances, would require divestiture. As of the date of this prospectus, we believe our investments complied with such laws and regulations in all material respects.

Credit for Reinsurance and Licensing

A primary insurer ordinarily will enter into a reinsurance agreement only if it can obtain credit for the reinsurance ceded on its statutory financial statements. In general, credit for reinsurance is allowed in the following circumstances: (1) if the reinsurer is licensed in the state in which the primary insurer is domiciled or, in some instances, in certain states in which the primary insurer is licensed; (2) if the reinsurer is an accredited or otherwise approved reinsurer in the state in which the primary insurer is domiciled or, in some instances, in certain states in which the primary insurer is licensed; (3) in some instances, if the reinsurer (a) is domiciled in a state that is deemed to have substantially similar credit for reinsurance standards as the state in which the primary insurer is domiciled and (b) meets certain financial requirements; or (4) if none of the above apply, to the extent that the reinsurance obligations of the reinsurer are collateralized appropriately, typically through the posting of a letter of credit for the benefit of the primary insurer or the deposit of assets into a trust fund established for the benefit of the primary insurer. As a result of the requirements relating to the provision of credit for reinsurance, our United States insurance subsidiaries face the above constraints in their dealings with out-of-state reinsurers and our reinsurance subsidiaries are indirectly subject to certain regulatory requirements imposed by jurisdictions in which ceding companies are licensed.

Table of Contents

Guaranty Funds

All 50 states have separate insurance guaranty fund laws requiring property and casualty insurance companies doing business within their respective jurisdictions to be members of their guaranty associations. These associations are organized to pay covered claims (as defined and limited by the various guaranty association statutes) under insurance policies issued by insolvent insurance companies. Such guaranty association laws, except the one applicable in New York, create post-assessment associations that make assessments against member insurers to obtain funds to pay association covered claims after an insurer becomes insolvent. These associations levy assessments (up to prescribed limits) on all member insurers in a particular state on the basis of the proportionate share of the premiums written by member insurers in the covered lines of business in that state. Maximum assessments permitted by law in any one year generally vary between 1% and 2% of annual premiums written by a member in that state. New York has a pre-assessment guaranty fund, which makes assessments prior to the occurrence of an insolvency. Florida, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania have created, by statute, a separate guaranty association for workers' compensation business. Some states permit member insurers to recover assessments paid through surcharges on policyholders or through full or partial premium tax offsets, while other states permit recovery of assessments through the rate filing process.

Our policy is to accrue for insolvencies when the loss is probable and the assessment amount can be reasonably estimated. In the case of most insurance insolvencies, our ability to reasonably estimate the insolvent insurer's liabilities or develop a meaningful range of the insolvent insurer's liabilities is significantly impaired by inadequate financial data with respect to the estate of the insolvent company as supplied by the guaranty funds. Although the amount of any assessments applicable to guaranty funds cannot be predicted with certainty, we believe that future guaranty association assessments for known insurer insolvencies will not have a material adverse effect on our results of operations or financial condition.

Shared Markets

As a condition of their licenses to do business, our operating subsidiaries are required to participate in mandatory property and casualty shared market mechanisms or pooling arrangements, which provide various types of insurance coverage to individuals or other entities that are otherwise unable to purchase such coverage in the commercial insurance marketplace. Our United States operating subsidiaries' participation in such shared markets or pooling mechanisms is generally proportionate to the amount of each of our operating subsidiaries' direct premiums written for the type of coverage written by the specific pooling mechanism in the applicable state.

Many states have laws that established second-injury funds to provide compensation to injured employees for aggravation of a prior condition or injury. Insurers writing workers' compensation in those states having second-injury funds are subject to the laws creating the funds, including the various funding mechanisms that those states have adopted to fund the second-injury funds. Several of the states having larger second-injury funds utilize a premium surcharge that effectively passes the cost of the fund on to policyholders. Other states assess the insurer based on paid losses and allow the insurer to recoup the assessment through future premium rates.

Commercial automobile insurance and workers' compensation lines have mandatory pooling arrangements on a state-by-state basis for segments of the market that have difficulty finding coverage from insurers. The shared market mechanisms for providing commercial automobile coverages are generally assigned risk plans, reinsurance facilities and joint underwriting facilities. Additionally, another pooling mechanism, a Commercial Automobile Insurance Procedure (CAIP), uses a limited number of servicing carriers to handle assignments from other insurers. The CAIP servicing carrier is paid a fee for the responsibility of handling the commercial automobile policy and paying claims. For workers' compensation, the pooling in each state is generally in the form of a reinsurance-type arrangement with servicing carriers providing the policy services and claims handling services. The National Council of Compensation Insurance provides services for calculating member pooling of losses and expenses in

Table of Contents

32 states, with the remainder of the states having their own independent servicing plans. Certain of our operating subsidiaries participate in the Florida Hurricane Catastrophe Fund, a state-mandated catastrophe reinsurance fund. Business insurance is also subject to pooled insurance on a small scale for commercial properties insured through the various Fair Access to Insurance Requirements Plans that exist in most states.

The amount of future losses or assessments from the shared market mechanisms and pooling arrangements described above cannot be predicted with certainty. The underwriting results of these pools traditionally have been unprofitable. Although it is possible that future losses or assessments from such mechanisms and pooling arrangements could have a material adverse effect on our results of operations, we do not expect future losses or assessments to have a material adverse effect on our liquidity or capital resources.

Liquidation of Insurers

The liquidation of United States insurance companies, including reinsurers, is generally conducted pursuant to state insurance law. In the event of the liquidation of one of our United States operating insurance subsidiaries, liquidation proceedings would be conducted by the insurance regulator of the state in which the subsidiary is domiciled, which would serve as the domestic receiver of its properties, assets and business. Liquidators located in other states (known as ancillary liquidators) in which we conduct business may have jurisdiction over assets or properties located in such states under certain circumstances. In a liquidation, policyholders would have priority over investors. Some states have adopted and others are considering legislative proposals that would authorize the establishment of an interstate compact concerning various aspects of insurer insolvency proceedings, including interstate governance of receiverships and guaranty funds.

Privacy Regulation

The Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act and regulations promulgated under the Act govern the privacy of consumer financial information. The regulations limit disclosure by financial institutions of nonpublic personal information about individuals who obtain financial products or services for personal, family, or household purposes. The Act and the regulations generally apply to disclosures to nonaffiliated third parties, subject to specified exceptions, but not to disclosures to affiliates. Privacy regulation is an evolving area of state and federal regulation, which requires us to continue to monitor developments.

Terrorism Risk Insurance Act of 2002

The Terrorism Risk Insurance Act of 2002 (TRIA) established a program under which the U.S. federal government will share with the insurance industry the risk of loss from certain acts of international terrorism. The program is applicable to substantially all commercial property and casualty lines of business (with the notable exception of reinsurance), and participation by insurers writing such lines is mandatory. Under TRIA, all applicable terrorism exclusions contained in policies in force on November 26, 2002 were voided. For policies in force on or after November 26, 2002, insurers are required to provide coverage for losses arising from acts of terrorism as defined by TRIA on terms and in amounts which may not differ materially from other policy coverages. To be covered under TRIA, aggregate losses from the act must exceed \$5.0 million, the act must be perpetrated within the U.S. on behalf of a foreign person or interest and the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury must certify that the act is covered under the program.

Under TRIA, the federal government will reimburse insurers for 90% of losses above a defined insurer deductible. The deductible for each participating insurer is based on a percentage of the combined direct earned premiums in the preceding calendar year of the insurer, defined to include its subsidiaries and affiliates. In 2005, the deductible is equal to 15% of the insurer's combined direct earned premiums for 2004. Federal reimbursement of the insurance industry pursuant to TRIA is limited to \$100.0 billion in 2005. Under certain circumstances, the federal government may require insurers to levy premium surcharges on policyholders to recoup for the federal government its reimbursements paid.

Table of Contents

While the provisions of TRIA and the purchase of certain terrorism reinsurance coverage mitigate our exposure in the event of a large-scale terrorist attack, our effective deductible is significant. Further, our exposure to losses from terrorist acts is not limited to TRIA events since domestic terrorism is generally not excluded from our policies and, regardless of TRIA, some state insurance regulators do not permit terrorism exclusions for various coverages or causes of loss. Accordingly, we continue to monitor carefully our concentrations of risk.

The TRIA program is scheduled to expire at the end of 2005, although bills have been introduced in Congress to extend the program.

Possible Legislative and Regulatory Changes

In recent years, the insurance industry has been subject to increased scrutiny by regulators and legislators. The NAIC and a number of state legislatures have considered or adopted legislative proposals that alter and, in many cases, increase the authority of state agencies to regulate insurance companies and holding company systems. In addition, several committees of Congress have made inquiries and conducted hearings as part of a broad study of the regulation of insurance companies, and legislation has been introduced in several of the past sessions of Congress which, if enacted, could result in the federal government assuming some role in the regulation of the insurance industry. Although the federal government does not regulate the business of insurance directly, federal initiatives often affect the insurance business in a variety of ways.

Legislation has been introduced in Congress that would require, as an essential element of an asbestos claim, a certification of physical impairment to which asbestos exposure was a substantial contributing factor. To date, Congress has taken no action on that legislation. In addition, a bill entitled the Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act (the FAIR Act) has been introduced in Congress to address the rising number of asbestos personal injury claims in the U.S. If enacted in its current form, the FAIR Act would establish a trust fund consisting of contributions from insurers, reinsurers and industrial defendants, which would provide the exclusive remedy for asbestos personal injury victims. As currently drafted, the FAIR Act would also create a medical certification requirement as a predicate to making an asbestos claim and would implement a schedule of standardized award values for the various asbestos-related injuries for which relief is proposed under the program. The bill was originally approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee in June 2003, but has been superseded by revised legislation introduced in the Senate in April 2004, with respect to which no further legislative action has occurred to date. We are currently not able to predict whether this bill will be enacted nor can we predict the provisions that its final form might contain in the event it becomes law. At this preliminary stage, we are unable to predict the impact that such legislation could have on our operations.

Finally, the ongoing investigations discussed above of insurance industry business practices may result in new laws or regulations at the state or federal level. See Risk Factors Certain business practices of the insurance industry have become the subject of investigations by government authorities and the subject of class action litigation.

It is not possible to predict the outcome of any of the foregoing legislative, administrative or congressional activities or the potential effects thereof on us.

Canada

General

Each of our Canadian insurance subsidiaries is federally incorporated under the *Insurance Companies Act* (ICA) and is licensed under insurance legislation in each of the provinces and territories in which it operates.

The ICA and provincial legislation require the filing by our Canadian insurance subsidiaries of annual and other reports on their financial condition, impose restrictions on transactions with related parties and set forth requirements governing reserves for actuarial liabilities and the safekeeping of assets and other

Table of Contents

matters. The ICA is administered, and the activities of our insurance subsidiaries are supervised, by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (OSFI). OSFI conducts examinations to ensure compliance with applicable legislation and to confirm the financial condition of the companies.

Investment Powers

Under the ICA, an insurance company must maintain a prudent portfolio of investments and loans, subject to certain overall limitations on the amount it may invest in certain classes of investments, such as commercial loans, real estate and equities. Additional restrictions (and in some cases, the need for regulatory approvals) limit the nature of an insurance company's investments.

Capital Requirements

Property and casualty insurers are required to meet a minimum capital test (MCT) that assesses the insurer's capital available to capital required. Federally regulated property and casualty insurers, including our Canadian insurance subsidiaries, must maintain available capital equal to at least the minimum capital requirement. OSFI expects insurers to establish a target capital level above the minimum requirement, and to maintain ongoing capital, at no less than the supervisory target of 150% of the MCT amount. However, OSFI may, on a case-by-case basis, establish in consultation with an insurer an alternate supervisory target based upon the company's risk profile. The ICA requires property and casualty insurance companies to maintain a minimum amount of capital calculated by reference to, and varying with, the risk characteristics of each category of on and off-balance sheet assets held by the company, policy liabilities and reinsurance receivable and recoverable. This MCT calculation typically requires the application of quantitative factors to assets, as well as to certain off-balance sheet items, based on a number of prescribed risk components. The calculation of policy liabilities takes into account the risk associated with variations in claims, provisions, possible inadequacy of provisions for unearned premiums and the occurrence of catastrophes. The calculation of reinsurance receivable and recoverable includes the risk of default for recoverables from reinsurers arising from both credit and actuarial risk. Federally incorporated Canadian life insurers are subject to capital requirements specific to life insurance companies, which are referred to as the Minimum Continuing Capital and Surplus Requirements (MCCSR). OSFI expects life insurers to establish a target capital level, and maintain on going capital, at no less than the supervisory target of 150% of the MCCSR. OSFI may invoke various remedies if these minimums are not maintained, including freezing property or taking control of the company if necessary to protect the interests of policyholders.

Restrictions on Dividends and Capital Transactions

Our insurance subsidiaries require regulatory approval prior to withdrawal of capital and, in certain circumstances, prior to the payment of dividends. The ICA prohibits the declaration or payment of any dividend on shares of an insurance company if there are reasonable grounds for believing a company is, or the payment of the dividend would cause the company to be, in contravention of applicable capital requirements. The ICA also prohibits the declaration or payment of a dividend in any financial year without OSFI approval if, at the time the dividend is declared, the total of the dividends declared by the company in that year would exceed the company's aggregate net income up to that time in that year and its retained net income for the preceding two financial years. The ICA also requires an insurance company to notify the Superintendent of Financial Institutions of the declaration of a dividend at least 10 days prior to the date fixed for its payment. Similarly, the ICA prohibits the purchase for cancellation of any shares issued by an insurance company or the redemption of any redeemable shares or other similar capital transactions, if there are reasonable grounds for believing that the company is, or the payment would cause the company to be, in contravention of its applicable capital requirements. These latter transactions would also require the prior approval of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions.

Table of Contents

Constraints on Shares

The ICA contains certain restrictions on the purchase or other acquisition, issue, transfer and voting of any shares of an insurance company. Pursuant to these restrictions, no person is permitted to acquire shares of any of our Canadian insurance subsidiaries, or to acquire control of a company who holds such an interest, if the acquisition would cause the person to have a significant interest in any class of shares of the company, unless the prior approval of the Minister of Finance (Canada) is obtained. In addition, we are not permitted to record any transfer or issue of shares of an insurance subsidiary if the transfer or issue would cause the person to have a significant interest in the company and such interest has not been approved. No person who has a significant interest in such a company may exercise any voting rights attached to the shares held by such person unless the prior approval of the Minister of Finance (Canada) is obtained. If a person contravenes any of these restrictions, the Minister of Finance (Canada) may, by order, direct that person to dispose of all or any portion of those shares. For these purposes, a person has a significant interest in a class of shares of an insurance company where the aggregate of any shares of that class beneficially owned by that person, or an entity controlled by that person and by any person associated or acting jointly or in concert with that person, exceeds 10% of all outstanding shares of that class of shares of the company.

Provincial Insurance Regulation

Each of our insurance subsidiaries is subject to provincial and territorial regulation and supervision in each of the provinces and territories of Canada in which they carry on business. Provincial insurance regulations deal primarily with the form of insurance contracts and the sale and marketing of insurance products, including licensing and supervision of insurance distributors. In the provinces of Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick and Newfoundland premium rates for automobile insurance are regulated by public authorities. They require insurers to submit proposed rates to a regulatory body and have them approved before use. The approval process may also involve a hearing. With respect to insurance policies, provincial regulation automatically deems different insurance contracts to include certain terms that cannot be changed without the approval of the relevant regulatory authority.

Property and Casualty Insurance Compensation Corporation (PACICC)

The Canadian property and casualty insurance industry created PACICC to provide Canadian policyholders with protection, within limits, against the loss of policy benefits in the event of the insolvency of their insurance company. PACICC is funded by its member insurance companies, including our Canadian property and casualty insurance subsidiaries.

Canadian Life and Health Insurance Compensation Corporation (Compcorp)

Compcorp provides its member companies' policyholders with specified levels of protections against the loss of benefits due to the financial failure of a member company. Compcorp is a not-for-profit corporation established and funded by its members, including our subsidiary, Federated Life Insurance Company of Canada.

United Kingdom

Acquisition or Change of Control

The United Kingdom Insurance Companies Act of 1982 requires prior approval by the Financial Services Authority of anyone proposing to become a controller of an insurance company or a reinsurance company that carries on business in the United Kingdom but which is incorporated outside the United Kingdom. In this case, any company or individual who is entitled to exercise or control the exercise of 10% or more of the voting power at any general meeting of the insurance company or reinsurance company or of a body corporate of which it is a subsidiary, is considered a controller. The operating subsidiaries of OdysseyRe in its London Market division carry on business in the United Kingdom.

Table of Contents

Under the bylaws made by Lloyd's pursuant to the Lloyd's Act of 1982, the prior written approval of the Council of Lloyd's is required of anyone proposing to become a controller of any Lloyd's Managing Agency. Any company or individual that holds 10% or more of the shares in the managing agency company, or is entitled to exercise or control the exercise of 10% or more of the voting power at any general meeting of the Lloyd's Managing Agency or, in both cases, of another company of which the Lloyd's Managing Agency is a subsidiary, is considered a controller. Newline, a subsidiary of OdysseyRe, is a Lloyd's Managing Agency.

Dividends

U.K. law prohibits any U.K. company from declaring a dividend to its stockholders unless such company has profits available for distribution. The determination of whether a company has profits available for distribution is based on a company's accumulated realized profits less its accumulated realized losses. While there are no additional statutory restrictions imposed by the United Kingdom insurance regulatory laws upon an insurer's ability to declare dividends, insurance regulators in the United Kingdom strictly control the maintenance of each insurance company's solvency margin within their jurisdiction and may restrict an insurer from declaring a dividend beyond a level which the regulators determine would adversely affect an insurer's solvency requirements. It is common practice in the United Kingdom to notify regulators in advance of any significant dividend payment.

DESCRIPTION OF DEBT SECURITIES

We may issue debt securities from time to time in one or more series. This section summarizes the general terms and provisions of the debt securities that will be common to all series that we offer pursuant to this prospectus. The specific terms relating to any series of our debt securities that we offer will be described in a prospectus supplement. You should read the applicable prospectus supplement for the terms of the series of debt securities offered. Because the terms of specific series of debt securities offered may differ from the general information that we have provided below, you should rely on information in the applicable prospectus supplement that contradicts any information below.

As required by U.S. federal law for all bonds and notes of companies that are publicly offered, the debt securities will be governed by a document called an indenture. An indenture is a contract between a financial institution, acting on your behalf as trustee of the debt securities offered, and us. The debt securities will be issued pursuant to an indenture dated as of December 1, 1993, among us, The Bank of New York, as the successor U.S. trustee, and CIBC Mellon Trust Company, as the successor Canadian trustee. The U.S. trustee and the Canadian trustee are referred to together in this prospectus as the trustees. When we refer to the indenture in this prospectus, we are referring to the indenture dated December 1, 1993 under which your debt securities will be issued, as supplemented by any supplemental indenture which may be applicable to your debt securities. The trustees have two main roles. First, subject to some limitations on the extent to which the trustees can act on your behalf, the trustees can enforce your rights against us if we default on our obligations under the indenture. Second, the trustees perform certain administrative duties for us.

The following section is a summary of the principal terms and provisions of the indenture. This summary is not complete. Because this section is a summary, it does not describe every aspect of the debt securities or the indenture. If we refer to particular provisions in the indenture, such provisions, including the definition of terms, are incorporated by reference in this prospectus as part of this summary. We urge you to read the indenture and any supplements thereto that are applicable to you because the indenture, as supplemented, and not this section, defines your rights as a holder of debt securities.

General

The debt securities offered hereby will be our unsecured obligations. The debt securities will be either our senior unsecured obligations issued in one or more series and referred to herein as the senior debt securities, or our subordinated unsecured obligations issued in one or more series and referred to herein as

Table of Contents

the subordinated debt securities. The senior debt securities will rank equal in right of payment to all of our other unsecured and unsubordinated indebtedness. The subordinated debt securities will be subordinated in right of payment to the prior payment in full of our senior debt securities and our senior indebtedness.

You should read the applicable prospectus supplement for the terms of the series of debt securities offered. The terms of the debt securities described in such prospectus supplement will be set forth in the indenture and in one or more resolutions of our board of directors, or pursuant to authority granted by one or more resolutions of our board of directors, or established pursuant to one or more supplemental indentures and may include the following, as applicable to the series of debt securities offered thereby:

the title of the debt securities;

any limit upon the aggregate principal amount of the debt securities that may be authenticated and delivered under the indenture;

the date or dates on which the principal of the debt securities is payable;

the rate or rates at which the debt securities will bear interest, if any, the date or dates from which interest will accrue and the dates on which interest will be payable;

the basis upon which interest will be calculated if other than on the basis of a 360-day year of twelve 30-day months;

the place or places, if any, other than or in addition to the City of New York, where the principal of (and premium, if any) and any interest on debt securities will be payable, any debt securities may be surrendered for registration of transfer, debt securities may be surrendered for exchange and the place or places where notices or demands to or upon us in respect of the debt securities may be served;

whether we have the option to redeem the debt securities, whether in whole or in part, and the period or periods within which, the price or prices at which, the currency in which, and other terms and conditions upon which debt securities may be redeemed;

whether we have the obligation, if any, to redeem, repay or purchase the debt securities pursuant to any sinking fund or analogous provision or at the option of a holder of debt securities, and the period or periods within which, the price or prices at which, the currency in which, and other terms and conditions upon which debt securities will be redeemed, repaid or purchased, in whole or in part, pursuant to such obligation;

if other than denominations of \$1,000 and any integral multiple thereof, the denominations in which any debt securities will be issuable;

if other than us or one of the trustees, the identity of each registrar and/or paying agent;

if other than the principal amount, the portion of the principal amount of debt securities that will be payable upon declaration of acceleration;

if other than U.S. dollars, the currency in which payment of the principal of, and premium, if any, or interest, if any, on the debt securities will be payable or in which the debt securities will be denominated;

whether the amount of payments of principal of, and premium, if any, or interest on the debt securities may be determined with reference to a formula or other method, and the manner in which such amounts will be determined;

whether the principal of, and premium, if any, and interest, if any, on the debt securities are to be payable, at our election or at the election of a holder, in a currency other than that in which such debt securities are denominated or stated to be payable, the period or periods within which, and the terms and conditions upon which, such election may be made, and the time and manner of

Table of Contents

determining the exchange rate between the currency in which such debt securities are denominated or stated to be payable and the currency in which such debt securities are to be so payable;

the designation of the initial exchange rate agent, if any;

any provisions limiting the applicability of, in modification of, in addition to or in lieu of the defeasance provisions of the indenture that will be applicable to the debt securities;

provisions, if any, granting special rights to the holders of debt securities upon the occurrence of such events as may be specified;

any deletions from, modifications of or additions to the events of default or covenants with respect to debt securities, whether or not such events of default or covenants are consistent with the events of default or covenants in the indenture;

whether any debt securities are to be issuable in global form and, if so, whether beneficial owners of interests in any such global security may exchange such interests for debt securities of such series and of like tenor of any authorized form and denomination and the circumstances under which any such exchanges may occur;

the person to whom any interest on any security will be payable, if other than the Person in whose name that security is registered at the close of business on the record date for such interest;

if debt securities are to be issuable in definitive form, whether upon original issue or upon exchange of a temporary security of such series, only upon receipt of certain certificates or other documents or satisfaction of other conditions, the form and/or terms of such certificates, documents or conditions;

any other terms, conditions, rights and preferences, or limitations on such rights and preferences, such as the subordination of the debt securities to our senior debt; and

any other terms specific to the debt securities offered, including whether the debt securities will be senior debt securities or subordinated debt securities.

Unless we indicate differently in the applicable prospectus supplement, the indenture pursuant to which the debt securities are issued does not contain any provisions that give you protection in the event we issue a large amount of debt, or in the event that we are acquired by another entity.

Form and Denomination of Debt Securities

Unless we indicate differently in the applicable prospectus supplement, the debt securities will be denominated in U.S. dollars, in minimum denominations of \$1,000 and multiples thereof.

We may issue the debt securities in registered form, in which case we may issue them either in book-entry form only or in certificated form. We also will have the option of issuing debt securities in non-registered form, as bearer securities, if we issue the securities outside the United States to non-U.S. persons. In that case, the applicable prospectus supplement will set forth the mechanics for holding the bearer securities, including the procedures for receiving payments, for exchanging the bearer securities for registered securities of the same series and for receiving notices. The applicable prospectus supplement will also describe the requirements with respect to our maintenance of offices or agencies outside the United States and the applicable U.S. federal tax law requirements.

Form, Exchange and Transfer of Registered Securities

If we cease to issue registered debt securities in global form, we will issue them:

only in fully registered certificated form; and

unless we indicate otherwise in the applicable prospectus supplement, in denominations of \$1,000 and amounts that are multiples of \$1,000.

Table of Contents

Holders may exchange their certificated securities for debt securities of smaller denominations or combined into fewer debt securities of larger denominations, as long as the total principal amount is not changed.

We will maintain an office or agency, specified in the applicable prospectus supplement, in each place of payment for the debt securities where securities of that series may be presented or surrendered for payment, registration of transfer or exchange.

Holders will not be required to pay a service charge to transfer or exchange their certificated securities, but they may be required to pay any tax or other governmental charge associated with the transfer or exchange. The transfer or exchange will be made only if our transfer agent is satisfied with the holder's proof of legal ownership.

If any debt securities of a particular series are redeemable, we may block the transfer or exchange of those debt securities during the period beginning 15 days before the day we mail the notice of redemption and ending on the day of that mailing. We may also refuse to register transfers or exchanges of any debt securities selected for redemption or to register transfers or exchanges of any debt securities surrendered for repayment at the option of the holder, except that we will continue to permit transfers and exchanges of the unredeemed portion of any debt security that will be partially redeemed.

If a registered debt security is issued in global form, only the depository will be entitled to transfer and exchange the debt security as described in this subsection because it will be the sole holder of the debt security.

Payment and Paying Agents

On each due date for interest payments on the debt securities, we will pay interest to each person shown on our records as owner of the debt securities at the close of business on a designated day that is in advance of the due date for interest. We will pay interest to each such person even if such person no longer owns the debt security on the interest due date. The designated day on which we will determine the owner of the debt security, as shown on our records, is also known as the record date. The record date will usually be about two weeks in advance of the interest due date.

Because we will pay interest on the debt securities to the holders of the debt securities based on ownership as of the applicable record date with respect to any given interest period, and not to the holders of the debt securities on the interest due date (that is, the day that the interest is to be paid), it is up to the holders who are buying and selling the debt securities to work out between themselves the appropriate purchase price for the debt securities. It is common for purchase prices of debt securities to be adjusted so as to prorate the interest on the debt securities fairly between the buyer and the seller based on their respective ownership periods within the applicable interest period.

Payments on Global Securities

We will make payments on a global security directly to the registered holders generally or a depository or its nominee, and not to any indirect holders who own beneficial interests in the global security. An indirect holder's right to those payments will be governed by the rules and practices of the depository and its participants, as described under *Global Securities* below.

Payments on Certificated Securities

We will make interest payments on debt securities held in certificated form by mailing a check or by wire transfer to an account maintained by the holder of the certificated securities located in the United States, as shown on our records, as of the close of business on the record date. Alternatively, we may make interest payments by mailing a check for such interest on each due date for interest payments to such holder of the certificated securities. We will make all payments of principal and premium, if any, on the certificated securities by check at our office or agency to be maintained in New York City, New York,

Table of Contents

and/or at other offices that may be specified in the applicable prospectus supplement or in a notice to holders, against surrender of the certificated security.

Payment When Offices Are Closed

If payment on a debt security is due on a day that is not a business day, we will make such payment on the next succeeding business day. The indenture provides that such payments will be treated as if they were made on the original due date for payment. A postponement of this kind will not result in a default under any debt security or indenture, and no interest will accrue on the amount of any payment that is postponed in this manner.

Book-entry and other indirect holders should consult their banks or brokers for information on how they will receive payments on their debt securities.

Events of Default

You will have special rights if an Event of Default occurs with respect to your debt securities and such Event of Default is not cured, as described later in this subsection.

Unless otherwise specified in the applicable prospectus supplement, the term **Event of Default** with respect to the debt securities offered means any of the following:

We do not pay the principal of, or any premium on, the debt security on its due date.

We do not pay interest on the debt security within 30 days of its due date.

We do not deposit any sinking fund payment, if applicable, with respect to the debt securities on its due date.

We remain in breach of a covenant or warranty (other than any payment covenant or a covenant or warranty included solely for the benefit of a different series of debt securities) in the indenture for 60 days after we receive a written notice of default stating that we are in breach. The notice must be sent by either of the trustees or the holders of at least 25% of the principal amount of the debt securities of the affected series.

We default in the payment, at the stated maturity, of any of our indebtedness for borrowed money in excess of \$10 million, or such indebtedness is accelerated, if such indebtedness has not been discharged, or such acceleration has not been rescinded or annulled, within 10 days after written notice has been given by either trustee, or the holders of at least 25% of the principal amount of all of the outstanding debt securities.

We file for bankruptcy or certain other events of bankruptcy, insolvency or reorganization occur.

Any other Event of Default that may be described in the applicable prospectus supplement, and set forth in the applicable supplemental indenture, occurs.

An Event of Default for a particular series of debt securities does not necessarily constitute an Event of Default for any other series of debt securities issued under the indenture.

Remedies if an Event of Default Occurs

If an Event of Default has occurred and has not been cured within the applicable time period, the trustees or the holders of 25% in principal amount of the debt securities of the affected series (or, in some cases, the holders of 25% in principal amount of the debt securities of all series) may declare the entire principal amount of all the debt securities of that series to be immediately due and payable. This is called a declaration of acceleration of maturity. A declaration of acceleration of maturity may be rescinded in certain circumstances by the holders of at least a majority in principal amount of the debt securities of the affected series or of all series, as the case may be. A declaration of acceleration of maturity following an event of default caused by a default in payment or acceleration of any of our indebtedness for borrowed

Table of Contents

money will be automatically annulled if such indebtedness is discharged or the holders of such indebtedness rescind their declaration of acceleration.

The trustees may withhold notice to the holders of debt securities of any default, except in the payment of principal or interest or the payment of any sinking fund installment, if they consider the withholding of notice to be in the best interests of the holders. Additionally, the trustees are not required to take any action under the indenture at the request of any of the holders of the debt securities unless such holders offer the trustees reasonable protection from expenses and liability (called an indemnity). If reasonable indemnity is provided, the holders of a majority in principal amount of the outstanding debt securities of the relevant series may direct the time, method and place of conduct of any lawsuit or other formal legal action seeking any remedy available to the trustees. The trustees may refuse to follow those directions in certain circumstances. No delay or omission in exercising any right or remedy will be treated as a waiver of that right, remedy or Event of Default.

Before a holder is allowed to bypass the trustees and bring its own lawsuit or other formal legal action or take other steps to enforce its rights or protect its interests relating to its debt securities, the following must occur:

The holder must give the trustee written notice that an Event of Default has occurred and remains uncured.

The holders of 25% in principal amount of all outstanding debt securities of the relevant series or, in some cases, of all series must make a written request that the trustee take action because of the default that has occurred and must offer reasonable indemnity to the trustee against the cost and other liabilities of taking that action.

The trustee must not have taken any action for 60 days after receipt of the above notice, request and offer of indemnity.

The holders of a majority in principal amount of the debt securities of the relevant series or, in some cases, of all series must not have given the trustee a direction inconsistent with the above notice or request.

Notwithstanding the above, a holder is entitled at any time to bring a lawsuit for the payment of money due on your debt securities on or after the due date for payment.

Holders of a majority in principal amount of the debt securities of the affected series or, in some cases, of all series may waive any past defaults other than:

the payment of principal, or any premium or interest, on the affected series of debt securities; or

a default in respect of a covenant that cannot be modified or amended without the consent of each holder of the affected series of debt securities.

Book-entry and other indirect holders should consult their banks or brokers for information on how to give notice or direction to or make a request of the trustee, and how to declare or rescind an acceleration of maturity on their debt securities.

Limitations on Liens on Capital Stock of Restricted Subsidiaries

The indenture provides that we may not, and may not permit any subsidiary to, create, assume, incur or suffer to exist any lien, other than a purchase money lien, upon any capital stock of any restricted subsidiary, to secure any obligation, other than the debt securities, without in any such case making effective provision whereby all of the outstanding securities shall be directly secured equally and ratably with such obligation. This restriction will not apply, however, to (i) liens on the capital stock of any restricted subsidiary securing obligations outstanding from time to time under any bank credit facility, *provided* that the principal amount of all such obligations secured by liens on the capital stock of any restricted subsidiary, at the time of each incurrence of any portion of such obligation, does not exceed 15% of the sum of (A) our consolidated shareholders' equity at the end of our most recently completed fiscal

Table of Contents

quarter immediately preceding such incurrence for which financial statements are or are required to be available and (B) the aggregate principal amount of all obligations which are outstanding under any bank credit facility immediately after giving effect to such incurrence and which are secured by liens on the capital stock of a restricted subsidiary, and (ii) liens securing obligations from us to any wholly-owned restricted subsidiary or from any wholly-owned restricted subsidiary to us or any other wholly-owned restricted subsidiary. A restricted subsidiary is any subsidiary that is a licensed insurance company, other than any licensed insurance company that our board of directors, in good faith, determines is not, individually or together with any other licensed insurance company as to which a similar determination has been made, material to our business, considered as a whole.

Merger or Consolidation

Unless otherwise specified in the applicable prospectus supplement, the terms of the indenture will generally permit us to amalgamate or consolidate with or merge into another corporation or convey, transfer or lease substantially all of our assets to another corporation. However, we may not take any of these actions unless, among other things, the following conditions are met:

in the event that, as a result of the transaction, we are not the surviving entity or we convey, transfer or lease all or substantially all of our assets, the surviving entity must be a corporation, partnership or trust organized under the laws of a jurisdiction in Canada or the United States and such entity must agree to be legally responsible for the debt securities; and

after giving effect to the transaction, no Event of Default shall have occurred or be continuing.

Modification or Waiver

There are three types of changes we can make to the indenture and the debt securities issued thereunder.

Changes Not Requiring Consent of Holders

There are certain changes that we may make to your debt securities without your specific approval and without any vote of the holders of the debt securities of the same series. Without your approval, we will be permitted to:

evidence the succession of another person to our obligations;

add covenants for the benefit of the holders of all or any series of debt securities or to surrender any right or power conferred to us in the indenture;

add any additional Events of Default;

add to or change any of the provisions of the indenture to the extent necessary to permit or facilitate the issuance of debt securities in bearer form, registrable or not registrable as to principal, and with or without interest coupons, or to provide for uncertificated debt securities, in compliance with applicable laws and regulations;

change or eliminate any of the provisions of the indenture; *provided* that any such change or elimination shall become effective only when there are no debt securities outstanding of any series created prior to the execution of such supplemental indenture which is entitled to the benefit of such provision;

secure the debt securities pursuant to the requirements of the covenant described under *Limitation on Liens of Capital Stock of Restricted Subsidiaries* ;

establish the form or terms of securities of any series as permitted by the indenture;

evidence and provide for the acceptance of appointment of a successor trustee with respect to the debt securities of one or more series and to add to or change any of the provisions of the indenture

Table of Contents

as is necessary to provide for or facilitate the administration of any trusts established under the indenture by more than two trustees;

close the indenture with respect to the authentication and delivery of additional series of debt securities, to cure any ambiguity, to correct or supplement any provision herein which may be inconsistent with any other provision herein, or to make any other provisions with respect to matters or questions arising under the indenture; *provided* that any such action will not adversely affect the interests of the holders of debt securities of any series in any material respect; or

supplement any of the provisions of the indenture to such extent as shall be necessary to permit or facilitate the defeasance and discharge of any series of debt securities; *provided* that any such action will not adversely affect the interests of the holders of debt securities of such series or any other series of debt securities in any material respect.

Changes Requiring Consent of Holders

First, there will be changes that we will not be permitted to make to the terms or provisions of your debt securities without your specific approval. Subject to the provisions of the indenture, without your specific approval, we will not be permitted to:

change the stated maturity of the principal of, or interest on, your debt securities;

reduce the principal amount of, or premium, if any, or interest on, your debt securities;

reduce the amount of principal payable upon acceleration of maturity of your debt securities;

make any change that adversely affects any right of repayment at your option;

change the place or currency of payment on your debt securities;

impair your right to sue for payment on your debt securities;

reduce the percentage of holders of outstanding debt securities of your series or of all series whose consent is needed to waive compliance with certain provisions of the indenture or to waive certain defaults of the indenture; or

modify any of the provisions of the indenture dealing with modification, waiver of past defaults or the waiver of certain covenants relating to your debt securities except to increase the percentage of holders of the debt securities required to approve certain matters or to require all holders of debt securities to approve certain matters.

Changes Requiring Majority Approval

Subject to the provisions of the indenture, any other change to, or waiver of, any provision of the indenture and the debt securities issued pursuant thereto would require the following approval:

If the change affects only one series of debt securities, it must be approved by the holders of a majority in principal amount of the outstanding debt securities of that series.

If the change affects more than one series of debt securities issued under the indenture, it must be approved by the holders of a majority in principal amount of the outstanding debt securities of all series affected by the change, with all affected series voting together as one class for this purpose.

Waiver of our compliance with certain provisions of the indenture must be approved by the holders of a majority in principal amount of the outstanding debt securities of all series issued under the indenture, voting together as one class for this purpose, in accordance with the terms of the indenture.

In each case, the required approval must be given in writing.

Table of Contents

Satisfaction and Discharge

The indenture will cease to be of further effect with respect to any series of debt securities and the trustees will execute proper instruments acknowledging satisfaction and discharge of the indenture as to a particular series of debt securities, when (A) either (1) all debt securities of such series authenticated and delivered have been delivered to the trustees for cancellation or (2) all debt securities of such series not so delivered to the trustees for cancellation (i) have become due and payable, or (ii) will become due and payable at their maturity within one year, or (iii) if redeemable at our option, are to be called for redemption within one year, and we have deposited or caused to be deposited with one of the trustees an amount, in the currency in which the debt securities of such series are payable, sufficient to pay and discharge the entire indebtedness on such debt securities not previously delivered to the trustees for cancellation, for principal, and premium, if any, and interest to the date of such deposit in the case of debt securities that have become due and payable or to maturity or redemption date, as the case may be and (B) we have paid or caused to be paid all other sums payable by us.

Defeasance

If specified in the applicable prospectus supplement and subject to the provisions of the indenture, we may elect either:

to be released from some of the covenants in the indenture under which your debt securities were issued (referred to as *covenant defeasance*); or

to be discharged from all of our obligations with respect to your debt securities, except for obligations to register the transfer or exchange of your debt securities, to replace mutilated, destroyed, lost or stolen debt securities, to maintain paying offices or agencies and to hold moneys for payment in trust (referred to as *full defeasance*).

Covenant Defeasance

In the event of covenant defeasance, you would lose the protection of some of our covenants in the indenture, but would gain the protection of having money and government securities set aside in trust to repay your debt securities.

Subject to the provisions of the indenture, to accomplish covenant defeasance with respect to the debt securities offered:

We must deposit in trust for the benefit of all holders of the debt securities of the same series as your debt securities a combination of money and government obligations issued in the currency in which the debt securities of the applicable series are payable, that would generate enough cash to make interest, principal and any other payments on such series of debt securities on the various dates when such payments would be due.

No Event of Default or event which with notice or lapse of time or both would become an Event of Default, including by reason of the above deposit of money, notes or bonds, with respect to your debt securities shall have occurred and be continuing on the date of such deposit or at any time during the three-month period after such a deposit in respect of certain bankruptcy or insolvency events.

We must not be insolvent on the date of the deposit of the funds or at any time during the three-month period after the date of such deposit.

No breach or violation of any covenant under the indenture shall occur as a result of such deposit.

We must deliver to the trustees of your debt securities a legal opinion of our counsel to the effect that, for U.S. federal income tax purposes and Canadian federal or provincial income tax or other tax purposes, you will not recognize income, gain or loss as a result of such covenant defeasance

Table of Contents

and that such covenant defeasance will not cause you to be taxed on your debt securities any differently than if such covenant defeasance had not occurred.

We must deliver to the trustees of your debt securities an officer's certificate and a legal opinion of our counsel stating that all conditions precedent to covenant defeasance, as set forth in the indenture, had been complied with.

We must comply with certain additional terms of, conditions to or limitations to covenant defeasance, as set forth in the indenture.

If we were to accomplish covenant defeasance, you could still look to us for repayment of the debt securities if there were a shortfall in the trust deposit or the trustee were prevented from making payment. In fact, if an Event of Default (such as our bankruptcy) occurred after we accomplish covenant defeasance and your debt securities became immediately due and payable, there might be a shortfall in our trust deposit. Depending on the event causing the default, you might not be able to obtain payment of the shortfall.

Full Defeasance

If we were to accomplish full defeasance, you would have to rely solely on the funds or notes or bonds that we deposit in trust for repayment of your debt securities. You could not look to us for repayment in the unlikely event of any shortfall in our trust deposit. The conditions to accomplish defeasance set out in the indenture include conditions to protect the trust deposit from claims of our lenders and other creditors if we were to become bankrupt or insolvent.

Subject to the provisions of the applicable indenture, in order to accomplish full defeasance with respect to the debt securities offered:

We must deposit in trust for the benefit of all holders of the debt securities of the same series as your debt securities a combination of money and government obligations issued in the currency in which the debt securities of the applicable series are payable, that would generate enough cash to make interest, principal and any other payments on such series of debt securities on the various dates when such payments would be due.

No Event of Default or event which with notice or lapse of time or both would become an Event of Default, including by reason of the above deposit of money, notes or bonds, with respect to your debt securities shall have occurred and be continuing on the date of such deposit or at any time during the three-month period after such a deposit in respect of certain bankruptcy or insolvency events.

We must not be insolvent on the date of the deposit of the funds or at any time during the three-month period after the date of such deposit.

No breach or violation of any covenant under the indenture shall occur as a result of such deposit.

We must deliver to the trustees of such debt securities a legal opinion of our counsel stating either that we have received, or there has been published, a ruling by the Internal Revenue Service or that there had been a change in the applicable U.S. federal income tax law, in either case to the effect that, for U.S. federal income tax purposes, you will not recognize income, gain or loss as a result of such full defeasance and that such full defeasance will not cause you to be taxed on your debt securities any differently than if such full defeasance had not occurred and we had just repaid your debt securities ourselves at maturity.

We must deliver to the trustees of your debt securities a legal opinion of our counsel to the effect that, for Canadian federal or provincial income tax purposes or other tax purposes, you will not recognize income, gain or loss as a result of such defeasance and that such defeasance will not cause you to be taxed on your debt securities any differently than if such defeasance had not occurred.

Table of Contents

We must deliver to the trustees of your debt securities an officer's certificate and a legal opinion of our counsel stating that all conditions precedent to full defeasance, as set forth in the indenture, had been complied with.

We must comply with certain additional terms of, conditions to or limitations to full defeasance, as set forth in the indenture.

Consent to Jurisdiction

The indenture provides that we will irrevocably appoint CT Corporation System, 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, New York 10011, as our authorized agent for service of process in any legal action or proceeding arising out of or relating to our indenture or the debt securities for actions brought under federal or state securities laws or for actions brought by either trustee in any New York Court, and will irrevocably submit to the jurisdiction of the New York Courts for such purposes.

Information Concerning the Trustees

The Bank of New York and CIBC Mellon Trust Company are the trustees under the indenture. We may maintain deposit accounts and conduct banking and other financing transactions with the trustees in the normal course of business.

Governing Law

The indenture is, and the debt securities will be, governed by, and construed in accordance with, the law of the State of New York and applicable trust indenture legislation.

Holders of Registered Debt Securities

Book-Entry Holders

We will issue registered debt securities in book-entry form only, unless we specify otherwise in the applicable prospectus supplement. Debt securities held in book-entry form will be represented by one or more global securities registered in the name of a depository or its nominee. The depository or its nominee will hold such global securities on behalf of financial institutions that participate in such depository's book-entry system. These participating financial institutions, in turn, hold beneficial interests in the global securities either on their own behalf or on behalf of their customers.

Under the indenture, only the person in whose name a debt security is registered is recognized as the holder of that debt security. Consequently, for debt securities issued in global form, we will recognize only the depository or its nominee as the holder of the debt securities, and we will make all payments on the debt securities to the depository or its nominee. The depository will then pass along the payments that it receives to its participants, which in turn will pass the payments along to their customers who are the beneficial owners of the debt securities. The depository and its participants do so under agreements they have made with one another or with their customers or by law; they are not obligated to do so under the terms of the debt securities or the terms of the indenture.

As a result, investors will not own debt securities directly. Instead, they will own beneficial interests in a global security, through a bank, broker or other financial institution that participates in the depository's book-entry system, or that holds an interest through a participant in the depository's book-entry system. As long as the debt securities are issued in global form, investors will be indirect holders, and not holders, of the debt securities.

Street Name Holders

In the event that we issue debt securities in certificated form, or in the event that a global security is terminated, investors may choose to hold their debt securities either in their own names or in street name. Debt securities held in street name are registered in the name of a bank, broker or other financial

Table of Contents

institution chosen by the investor, and the investor would hold a beneficial interest in those debt securities through the account that he or she maintains at such bank, broker or other financial institution.

For debt securities held in street name, we will recognize only the intermediary banks, brokers and other financial institutions in whose names the debt securities are registered as the holders of those debt securities, and we will make all payments on those debt securities to them. These institutions will pass along the payments that they receive from us to their customers who are the beneficial owners pursuant to agreements that they have entered into with such customers or by law; they are not obligated to do so under the terms of the debt securities or the terms of the indenture. Investors who hold debt securities in street name will be indirect holders, and not holders, of the debt securities.

Legal Holders

Our obligations, as well as the obligations of the trustee and those of any third parties employed by the trustee or us, run only to the legal holders of the debt securities. We do not have obligations to investors who hold beneficial interests in global securities, in street name or by any other indirect means and who are, therefore, not the legal holders of the debt securities. This will be the case whether an investor chooses to be an indirect holder of a debt security, or has no choice in the matter because we are issuing the debt securities only in global form.

For example, once we make a payment or give a notice to the legal holder of the debt securities, we have no further responsibility with respect to such payment or notice even if that legal holder is required, under agreements with depositary participants or customers or by law, to pass it along to the indirect holders but does not do so. Similarly, if we want to obtain the approval of the holders for any purpose (for example, to amend the indenture or to relieve us of the consequences of a default or of our obligation to comply with a particular provision of the indenture), we would seek the approval only from the legal holders, and not the indirect holders, of the debt securities. Whether and how the legal holders contact the indirect holders is up to the legal holders.

Notwithstanding the above, when we refer to *you* or *your* in this prospectus, we are referring to investors who invest in the debt securities being offered by this prospectus, whether they are the legal holders or only indirect holders of the debt securities offered. When we refer to *your* debt securities in this prospectus, we mean the series of debt securities in which you hold a direct or indirect interest.

Special Considerations for Indirect Holders

If you hold debt securities through a bank, broker or other financial institution, either in book-entry form or in street name, we urge you to check with that institution to find out:

how it handles securities payments and notices;

whether it imposes fees or charges;

how it would handle a request for its consent, as a legal holder of the debt securities, if ever required;

if permitted for a particular series of debt securities, whether and how you can instruct it to send you debt securities registered in your own name so you can be a legal holder of such debt securities;

how it would exercise rights under the debt securities if there were a default or other event triggering the need for holders to act to protect their interests; and

if the debt securities are in book-entry form, how the depositary's rules and procedures will affect these matters.

Table of Contents

Global Securities

A global security represents one or any other number of individual debt securities. Generally, all debt securities represented by the same global securities will have the same terms. Each debt security issued in book-entry form will be represented by a global security that we deposit with and register in the name of a financial institution or its nominee that we select. The financial institution that we select for this purpose is called the depository. Unless we specify otherwise in the applicable prospectus supplement, The Depository Trust Company, New York, New York, known as DTC, will be the depository for all debt securities that we issue in book-entry form.

A global security may not be transferred to or registered in the name of anyone other than the depository or its nominee, unless special termination situations arise. We describe those situations below under *Special Situations When a Global Security Will Be Terminated*. As a result of these arrangements, the depository, or its nominee, will be the sole legal holder of all debt securities represented by a global security, and investors will be permitted to own only beneficial interests in a global security. Beneficial interests must be held by means of an account with a broker, bank or other financial institution that in turn has an account either with the depository or with another institution that has an account with the depository. Thus, an investor whose security is represented by a global security will not be a legal holder of the debt security, but an indirect holder of a beneficial interest in the global security.

Special Considerations for Global Securities

As an indirect holder, an investor's rights relating to a global security will be governed by the account rules of the investor's financial institution and of the depository, as well as general laws relating to securities transfers. The depository that holds the global security will be considered the legal holder of the debt securities represented by such global security.

If debt securities are issued only in the form of a global security, an investor should be aware of the following:

An investor cannot cause the debt securities to be registered in his or her name, and cannot obtain non-global certificates for his or her interest in the debt securities, except in the special situations we describe below under *Special Situations When a Global Security Will Be Terminated*.

An investor will be an indirect holder and must look to his or her own bank or broker for payments on the debt securities and protection of his or her legal rights relating to the debt securities, as we describe under *Holders of Registered Debt Securities* above.

An investor may not be able to sell his or her interest in the debt securities to some insurance companies and other institutions that are required by law to own their securities in non-book-entry form.

An investor may not be able to pledge his or her interest in the debt securities in circumstances where certificates representing the debt securities must be delivered to the lender or other beneficiary of the pledge in order for the pledge to be effective.

The depository's policies, which may change from time to time, will govern payments, transfers, exchanges and other matters relating to an investor's interest in the debt securities. Neither the trustee nor we have any responsibility for any aspect of the depository's actions or for the depository's records of ownership interests in a global security. Additionally, neither the trustee nor we supervise the depository in any way.

DTC requires that those who purchase and sell interests in a global security that is deposited in its book-entry system use immediately available funds. Your broker or bank may also require you to use immediately available funds when purchasing or selling interests in a global security.

Financial institutions that participate in the depository's book-entry system, and through which an investor holds its interest in a global security, may also have their own policies affecting payments,

Table of Contents

notices and other matters relating to the debt security. There may be more than one financial intermediary in the chain of ownership for an investor. We do not monitor and are not responsible for the actions of any of such intermediaries.

Special Situations When a Global Security Will Be Terminated

In a few special situations described below, a global security will be terminated and interests in the global security will be exchanged for certificates in non-global form, referred to as certificated debt securities. After such an exchange, it will be up to the investor as to whether to hold the certificated debt securities directly or in street name. We have described the rights of direct holders and street name holders under *Holder of Registered Debt Securities* above. Investors must consult their own banks or brokers to find out how to have their interests in a global security exchanged on termination of a global security for certificated debt securities to be held directly in their own names.

The special situations for termination of a global security are as follows:

if the depository notifies us that it is unwilling, unable or no longer qualified to continue as depository for that global security, and we do not appoint another institution to act as depository within 60 days of such notification;

if we notify the trustee that we wish to terminate that global security; or

if an event of default has occurred with regard to the debt securities represented by that global security and such event of default has not been cured or waived.

The applicable prospectus supplement may list situations for terminating a global security that would apply only to the particular series of debt securities covered by such prospectus supplement. If a global security were terminated, only the depository, and not we or the trustee, would be responsible for deciding the names of the institutions in whose names the debt securities represented by the global security would be registered and, therefore, who would be the legal holders of those debt securities.

DESCRIPTION OF SUBORDINATE VOTING SHARES AND PREFERRED SHARES

The following briefly summarizes the provisions of our articles of incorporation, including a description of our Subordinate Voting Shares and preferred shares. The following description may not be complete and is subject to, and qualified in its entirety by reference to, the terms and provisions of our articles of incorporation.

Our authorized share capital consists of an unlimited number of Multiple Voting Shares carrying ten votes per share, an unlimited number of Subordinate Voting Shares carrying one vote per share and an unlimited number of preferred shares, issuable in series. At January 24, 2005, there were outstanding 1,548,000 Multiple Voting Shares and 15,342,759 Subordinate Voting Shares, including 799,230 shares effectively held by Fairfax through an ownership interest in The Sixty Two Investment Company Limited (Sixty Two), as well as 3,000,000 Series A preferred shares and 5,000,000 Series B preferred shares.

Multiple Voting Shares and Subordinate Voting Shares

Dividend Rights

Holders of Multiple Voting Shares and Subordinate Voting Shares participate equally as to dividends and are entitled to dividends, in equal amounts per share and at the same time, that our board of directors may declare out of legally available funds, subject to the preferential dividend rights of the preferred shares.

Voting Rights

Holders of Multiple Voting Shares and Subordinate Voting Shares are entitled to receive notice of any meeting of our shareholders and may attend and vote at such meetings, except those meetings where

Table of Contents

only the holders of shares of another class or of a particular series are entitled to vote. The Multiple Voting Shares are entitled to ten votes per share, except as set forth below, and the Subordinate Voting Shares are entitled to one vote per share.

The ten votes per share attached to the Multiple Voting Shares are automatically and permanently reduced to one vote per share if:

(i) the number of the Multiple Voting Shares held by Sixty Two (and its 75% owned subsidiaries, of which there are currently none) falls below 1,197,480 shares, unless this results from a sale of shares to purchasers who make an equivalent unconditional offer to purchase all outstanding Subordinate Voting Shares; or

(ii) the number of the Multiple Voting Shares held by purchasers referred to in (i) above (and their 75% owned subsidiaries) falls below 1,197,480.

A change of control of Sixty Two or a purchaser referred to in (i) above will disqualify that shareholder's holding of shares for the purposes of the calculations contained in (i) and (ii) above. Except in connection with a sale to a purchaser who makes an offer to purchase all outstanding Subordinate Voting Shares as contemplated by (i) above, Sixty Two has agreed with us that it will not sell our shares carrying multiple voting rights (except to its 75% owned subsidiaries).

The number of votes attached to the Multiple Voting Shares will automatically but temporarily be reduced to one vote per share for any shareholders' meeting if, during the three months ending ten days prior to the date we send notice of the shareholders' meeting, the weighted average trading price in the principal trading market of the Subordinate Voting Shares for any period of thirty consecutive trading days is less than Cdn\$4.00 per share (subject to adjustment).

Preemptive, Subscription, Redemption and Conversion Rights

Holders of Subordinate Voting Shares and Multiple Voting Shares have no preemptive, subscription or redemption rights. Holders of Subordinate Voting Shares have no conversion rights. Multiple Voting Shares are convertible at any time into Subordinate Voting Shares on the basis of one Subordinate Voting Share for each Multiple Voting Share being converted.

Liquidation Rights

Upon our liquidation, dissolution or winding up, whether voluntary or involuntary, the holders of the Subordinate Voting Shares and Multiple Voting Shares, without preference or distinction, are entitled to receive ratably all of our assets remaining after payment of all debts and other liabilities, subject to the prior rights of holders of any outstanding preferred shares and any other prior ranking shares.

Modifications

Modifications to the provisions attaching to the Multiple Voting Shares as a class, or to the Subordinate Voting Shares as a class, require the separate affirmative vote of two-thirds of the votes cast at meetings of the holders of the shares of each class.

No subdivision or consolidation of the Multiple Voting Shares or of the Subordinate Voting Shares may take place unless the shares of both classes are subdivided or consolidated at the same time in the same manner and proportion.

No rights to acquire additional shares or other securities or property of ours will be issued to holders of Multiple Voting Shares or Subordinate Voting Shares unless the same rights are issued at the same time to holders of shares of both classes.

Table of Contents

Preferred Shares

As you read this section, please remember that the specific terms of your series of preferred shares as described in your prospectus supplement will supplement and, if applicable, may modify or replace the general terms described in this section. If there are differences between your prospectus supplement and this prospectus, your prospectus supplement will control. Thus, the statements we make in this section may not apply to your series of preferred shares.

Reference to a series of preferred shares means all of the preferred shares issued as part of the same series and having the attributes set out in articles of amendment. Reference to your prospectus supplement means the prospectus supplement describing the specific terms of the preferred shares you purchase. The terms in your prospectus supplement will have the meanings described in this prospectus, unless otherwise specified.

Our Authorized Preferred Shares

Under our articles of incorporation, our board of directors is authorized, subject to Canadian law, without shareholder approval, from time to time to issue an unlimited number of preferred shares in one or more series. Our board of directors can fix the rights, privileges, restrictions and conditions of the shares of each series. Preferred shares are entitled to priority over our Subordinate Voting Shares and Multiple Voting Shares as to dividends and distributions of assets upon our liquidation, dissolution or winding-up. Preferred shares may be convertible into shares of any other series or class of shares if our board of directors so determines. Our board of directors will fix the terms of the series of preferred shares it designates by resolution and will file articles of amendment as required under Canadian law before we issue any shares of the series of preferred shares.

The prospectus supplement relating to the particular series of preferred shares will contain a description of the specific terms of that series as fixed by our board of directors, including, as applicable;

the offering price at which we will issue the preferred shares;

the title and designation of number of shares of the series of preferred shares;

the dividend rate or method of calculation, the payment dates for dividends and the place or places where the dividends will be paid, whether dividends will be cumulative or noncumulative, and, if cumulative, the dates from which dividends will begin to accumulate;

any conversion or exchange rights;

whether the preferred shares will be subject to redemption and the redemption price and other terms and conditions relative to the redemption rights;

any liquidation rights;

any sinking fund provisions;

any voting rights; and

any other rights, preferences, privileges, limitations and restrictions that are not inconsistent with the terms of our articles of incorporation.

The preferred shares of each series shall rank on a parity with the preferred shares of every other series with respect to dividends and return of capital in the event of the liquidation, dissolution or winding-up, and will be entitled to a preference over our Subordinate Voting Shares and Multiple Voting Shares and over any other shares ranking junior to the preferred shares with respect to priority in payment of dividends and in the distribution of assets in the event of our liquidation, dissolution or winding-up, whether voluntary or involuntary, or any other distribution of our assets among shareholders for the purpose of winding-up our affairs. If any cumulative dividends, whether or not declared, or declared non-cumulative dividends or amounts payable on a return of capital in the event of the liquidation, dissolution or winding-up are not paid in full in respect of any series of the preferred shares, the preferred shares of

Table of Contents

all series will participate ratably in respect of such dividends in accordance with the sums that would be payable on such shares if all such dividends were declared and paid in full, and in respect of such return of capital in accordance with the sums that would be payable on such return of capital if all sums so payable were paid in full; provided, however, that if there are insufficient assets to satisfy in full all such claims, the claims of the holders of the preferred shares with respect to return of capital will be paid and satisfied first and any assets remaining thereafter will be applied towards the payment and satisfaction of claims in respect of dividends. The preferred shares of any series may also be given such other preferences not inconsistent with the rights, privileges, restrictions and conditions attached to the preferred shares as a class over our Subordinate Voting Shares and Multiple Voting Shares and over any other shares ranking junior to the preferred shares as may be determined in the case of such series of preferred shares.

Voting Rights

The prior approval of not less than two-thirds of the votes cast at a meeting of holders of Subordinate Voting Shares is required before we may create any class or series of shares that have voting rights (except as required by law or allowed if dividends are in arrears).

Amendment with Approval of Holders of the Preferred Shares

The rights, privileges, restrictions and conditions attached to the preferred shares as a class may be added to, changed or removed but only with the approval of the holders of the preferred shares. The approval of the holders of the preferred shares to add to, change or remove any right, privilege, restriction or condition attaching to the preferred shares as a class or in respect of any other matter requiring the consent of the holders of the preferred shares may be given in such manner as may then be required by Canadian law, subject to a minimum requirement that such approval be given by resolution signed by all the holders of the preferred shares or passed by the affirmative vote of at least 2/3 of the votes cast at a meeting of the holders of the preferred shares duly called for that purpose.

The formalities to be observed with respect to the giving of notice of any such meeting or any adjourned meeting, the quorum required therefore and the conduct thereof will be those from time to time prescribed by our by-laws with respect to meetings of shareholders, or if not so prescribed, as required by Canadian law as in force at the time of the meeting. On every poll taken at every meeting of the holders of the preferred shares as a class, or at any joint meeting of the holders of two or more series of preferred shares, each holder of preferred shares entitled to vote at such meeting will have one vote in respect of each preference share held.

Redemption

If so specified in the applicable prospectus supplement, a series of preferred shares may be redeemable at any time, in whole or in part, at our option or the holder's, or may be subject to mandatory redemption.

Any restriction on the repurchase or redemption by us of our preferred shares while we are in arrears in the payment of dividends will be described in the applicable prospectus supplement.

Any partial redemptions of preferred shares will be made in a way that our board of directors decides is equitable.

Unless we default in the payment of the redemption price, dividends will cease to accrue after the redemption date on shares of preferred shares called for redemption and all rights of holders of these shares will terminate except for the right to receive the redemption price.

Dividends

Holders of each series of preferred shares will be entitled to receive dividends when, as and if declared by our board of directors from funds legally available for payment of dividends. The rates and dates of payment of dividends will be set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement relating to each

Table of Contents

series of preferred shares. Dividends will be payable to holders of record of preferred shares as they appear on our books on the record dates fixed by the board of directors. Dividends on any series of preferred shares may be cumulative or noncumulative, as set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement.

Conversion or Exchange Rights

The prospectus supplement relating to any series of preferred shares that is convertible or exchangeable will state the terms on which shares of that series are convertible into or exchangeable for Subordinate Voting Shares, another series of our preferred shares or any other securities offered pursuant to this prospectus.

Transfer Agent and Registrar

The transfer agent, registrar and dividend disbursement agent for the preferred shares will be stated in the applicable prospectus supplement. The registrar for shares of preferred shares will send notice to shareholders of any meetings at which holders of the preferred shares have the right to vote on any matter.

Series A Preferred Shares

The Series A preferred shares are non-voting and are redeemable at any time at our option. Dividends are payable at an annual rate based upon, among other things, the prime rate (however, the annual rate will in no event be less than 5%). The Series A preferred shares are not retractable at the option of the holder. The total number of authorized Series A preferred shares is 8,000,000, 3,000,000 of which are currently issued and outstanding. Series A preferred shares are convertible into Series B preferred shares on a one-for-one basis on December 1, 2009 and on December 1 in every fifth year thereafter, subject to certain conditions.

Series B Preferred Shares

The Series B preferred shares are non-voting and are redeemable at our option on December 1, 2009 and on December 1 in every fifth year thereafter. Dividends are payable at an annual rate of 6.5% per annum until November 30, 2009 and thereafter at an annual rate based upon, among other things, the yield of five year Government of Canada bonds. The Series B preferred shares are not retractable at the option of the holder. The total number of authorized Series B preferred shares is 8,000,000, 5,000,000 of which are currently issued and outstanding. Series B preferred shares are convertible into Series A preferred shares on a one-for-one basis on December 1, 2009 and on December 1 in every fifth year thereafter, subject to certain conditions.

DESCRIPTION OF WARRANTS

The following description of the terms of the warrants sets forth certain general terms and provisions of the warrants to which any prospectus supplement may relate. We will not offer warrants for sale separately to any member of the public in Canada unless the offering is in connection with and forms part of the consideration for an acquisition or merger transaction or unless the prospectus supplement containing the specific terms of the warrants to be offered separately is first approved for filing by the securities commissions or similar regulatory authorities in each of the provinces and territories of Canada where the warrants will be offered for sale.

We may issue warrants for the purchase of debt securities, preferred shares or Subordinate Voting Shares. Warrants may be issued independently or together with debt securities, preferred shares or Subordinate Voting Shares offered by any prospectus supplement and may be attached to, or separate from, any such offered securities. Each series of warrants will be issued under a separate warrant agreement to be entered into between us and a bank or trust company, as warrant agent. The warrant agent will act solely as our agent in connection with the warrants and will not assume any obligation or relationship of agency or trust for or with any holders or beneficial owners of warrants. The following

Table of Contents

summary of certain provisions of the warrants does not purport to be complete and is subject to, and qualified in its entirety by, reference to the applicable warrant agreement. The specific terms of the warrants, and the extent to which the general terms described in this section apply to those warrants, will be set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement.

Debt Warrants

The prospectus supplement relating to a particular issue of debt warrants will describe the terms of such debt warrants, including the following:

the title of such debt warrants;

the offering price for such debt warrants, if any;

the aggregate number of such debt warrants;

the designation and terms of the debt securities purchasable upon exercise of such debt warrants;

if applicable, the designation and terms of the debt securities with which such debt warrants are issued and the number of such debt warrants issued with each such debt security;

if applicable, the date from and after which such debt warrants and any debt securities issued therewith will be separately transferable;

the principal amount of debt securities purchasable upon exercise of a debt warrant and the price at which such principal amount of debt securities may be purchased upon exercise (which price may be payable in cash, securities, or other property);

the date on which the right to exercise such debt warrants shall commence and the date on which such right shall expire;

if applicable, the minimum or maximum amount of such debt warrants that may be exercised at any one time;

whether the debt warrants represented by the debt warrant certificates or debt securities that may be issued upon exercise of the debt warrants will be issued in registered or bearer form;

information with respect to book-entry procedures, if any;

the currency or currency units in which the offering price, if any, and the exercise price are payable;

if applicable, a discussion of principal United States and Canadian federal income tax considerations;

the antidilution or adjustment provisions of such debt warrants, if any;

the redemption or call provisions, if any, applicable to such debt warrants; and

any additional terms of such debt warrants, including terms, procedures, and limitations relating to the exchange and exercise of such debt warrants.

Share Warrants

The prospectus supplement relating to any particular issue of preference share warrants or Subordinate Voting Share warrants will describe the terms of such warrants, including the following:

the title of such warrants;

the offering price for such warrants, if any;

the aggregate number of such warrants;

42

Table of Contents

the designation and terms of the Subordinate Voting Share or series of preferred shares purchasable upon exercise of such warrants;

if applicable, the designation and terms of the offered securities with which such warrants are issued and the number of such warrants issued with each such offered security;

if applicable, the date from and after which such warrants and any offered securities issued therewith will be separately transferable;

the number of Subordinate Voting Share or preferred shares purchasable upon exercise of a warrant and the price at which such shares may be purchased upon exercise;

the date on which the right to exercise such warrants shall commence and the date on which such right shall expire;

if applicable, the minimum or maximum amount of such warrants that may be exercised at any one time;

the currency or currency units in which the offering price, if any, and the exercise price are payable;

if applicable, a discussion of principal United States and Canadian federal income tax considerations;

the antidilution provisions of such warrants, if any;

the redemption or call provisions, if any, applicable to such warrants; and

any additional terms of such warrants, including terms, procedures and limitations relating to the exchange and exercise of such warrants.

Exercise of Warrants

A warrant will entitle the holder to purchase for cash an amount of securities at an exercise price that will be stated in, or that will be determinable as described in, the applicable prospectus supplement.

Warrants may be exercised at any time up to the close of business on the expiration date set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement. After the close of business on the expiration date, unexercised warrants will become void.

Warrants may be exercised as set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement. Upon receipt of payment and the warrant certificate properly completed and duly executed at the corporate trust office of the warrant agent or any other office indicated in the prospectus supplement, we will, as soon as practicable, forward the securities purchasable upon such exercise. If less than all of the warrants represented by such warrant certificate are exercised, a new warrant certificate will be issued for the remaining warrants.

DESCRIPTION OF SHARE PURCHASE CONTRACTS

We may issue share purchase contracts, representing contracts obligating holders to purchase from or sell to us, and obligating us to purchase from or sell to the holders, a specified number of our Subordinate Voting Shares or preferred shares, as applicable, at a future date or dates. We will not offer share purchase contracts for sale to any member of the public in Canada unless the prospectus supplement containing the specific terms of the share purchase contracts to be offered is first approved for filing by the securities commissions or similar regulatory authorities in each of the provinces of Canada where the share purchase contracts will be offered for sale.

The price per Subordinate Voting Share or preference share, as applicable, may be fixed at the time the share purchase contracts are issued or may be determined by reference to a specific formula contained

Table of Contents

in the share purchase contracts. We may issue share purchase contracts in accordance with applicable laws and in such amounts and in as many distinct series as we wish.

The applicable prospectus supplement may contain, where applicable, the following information about the share purchase contracts issued under it:

whether the share purchase contracts obligate the holder to purchase or sell, or both purchase and sell, our Subordinate Voting Shares or preferred shares, as applicable, and the nature and amount of each of those securities, or the method of determining those amounts;

whether the share purchase contracts are to be prepaid or not;

whether the share purchase contracts are to be settled by delivery, or by reference or linkage to the value or performance of our Subordinate Voting Shares or preferred shares;

any acceleration, cancellation, termination or other provisions relating to the settlement of the share purchase contracts; and

whether the share purchase contracts will be issued in fully registered or global form.

The applicable prospectus supplement will describe the terms of any share purchase contracts. The preceding description and any description of share purchase contracts in the applicable prospectus supplement does not purport to be complete and is subject to and is qualified in its entirety by reference to the share purchase contract agreement and, if applicable, collateral arrangements and depository arrangements relating to such share purchase contracts.

DESCRIPTION OF UNITS

We may issue units comprised of one or more of the other securities described in this prospectus in any combination. Each unit will be issued so that the holder of the unit is also the holder of each security included in the unit. Thus, the holder of a unit will have the rights and obligations of a holder of each included security. The unit agreement under which a unit is issued may provide that the securities included in the unit may not be held or transferred separately, at any time or at any time before a specified date.

The applicable prospectus supplement may describe:

the designation and terms of the units and of the securities comprising the units, including whether and under what circumstances those securities may be held or transferred separately;

any provisions for the issuance, payment, settlement, transfer or exchange of the units or of the securities comprising the units; and

whether the units will be issued in fully registered or global form.

The applicable prospectus supplement will describe the terms of any units. The preceding description and any description of units in the applicable prospectus supplement does not purport to be complete and is subject to and is qualified in its entirety by reference to the unit agreement and, if applicable, collateral arrangements and depository arrangements relating to such units.

Table of Contents

PLAN OF DISTRIBUTION

We may issue the securities offered by this prospectus for cash or other consideration:

to or through underwriters, dealers, placement agents or other intermediaries, or

directly to one or more purchasers, provided that applicable exemptions have been obtained.

The prospectus supplement with respect to the securities being offered will set forth the terms of the offering of the securities, including:

the name or names of any underwriters, dealers or other placement agents,

the purchase price of, and form of consideration for, the securities and the proceeds, if any, to us from such sale or exchange,

any delayed delivery arrangements,

any underwriting discounts and other items constituting underwriters' compensation,

any offering price, and

any discounts or concessions allowed or reallocated or paid to dealers and any securities exchanges on which the securities may be listed.

Only underwriters named in the prospectus supplement are deemed to be underwriters in connection with the securities offered by that prospectus supplement.

Under agreements which may be entered into by us, underwriters, dealers and agents who participate in the distribution of securities may be entitled to indemnification by us against certain liabilities, including liabilities under the U.S. Securities Act of 1933 and Canadian provincial securities legislation, or to contributions with respect to payments which such underwriters, dealers or agents may be required to make in respect thereof. The underwriters, dealers and agents with whom we enter into agreements may be customers of, engage in transactions with or perform services for us in the ordinary course of business.

In connection with any offering of securities, the underwriters may over-allot or effect transactions which stabilize or maintain the market price of the securities offered at a level above that which might otherwise prevail in the open market. Such transactions, if commenced, may be discontinued at any time.

Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, we also may issue some or all of the securities offered by this prospectus in exchange for property, including securities or assets of ours or of other companies which we may acquire in the future.

Table of Contents

EARNINGS COVERAGE RATIOS

The following consolidated financial ratios are calculated for the twelve-month periods ended December 31, 2003 and September 30, 2004. For the twelve month period ended December 31, 2003, the following table does not give effect to:

the exchange offer completed April 29, 2004 pursuant to which \$22.0 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/4% senior notes due 2012 were issued, together with a cash payment of \$19.7 million, in exchange for \$39.4 million aggregate principal amount of TIG s 8 1/8% notes due 2005 (and the subsequent exchange of such notes for our registered 7 3/4% senior notes due 2012);

the exchange offer completed on April 29, 2004 pursuant to which \$138.4 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/4% senior notes due 2012 were issued, together with a cash payment of \$38.5 million, in exchange for \$94.5 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/8% senior notes due 2006 and \$70.8 million aggregate principal amount of our 6 7/8% senior notes due 2008;

the private exchange completed on June 29, 2004 pursuant to which \$11.0 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/4% senior notes due 2012 were issued in exchange for \$10.0 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/8% senior notes due 2006;

the offering of notes completed on August 24, 2004 pursuant to which \$95.0 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/4% senior notes due 2012 were issued for cash proceeds of \$91.5 million;

the repurchase, from August 24, 2004 to September 10, 2004, of \$40.3 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/8% senior notes due 2006;

the repurchase, from August 30, 2004 to September 9, 2004, of \$20.0 million aggregate principal amount of TIG s 8 1/8% notes due 2005;

the repurchase, from October 29, 2004 to November 3, 2004, of \$23.0 million aggregate principal amount of TIG s 8.597% Capital Securities due 2027;

the repurchase, on November 1, 2004, of \$5.0 million aggregate principal amount of our 8.3% senior notes due 2026;

the repurchase, on November 16, 2004 and November 17, 2004, of \$6.5 million aggregate principal amount of our 5.0% convertible senior debentures due 2023;

the repurchase, on November 19, 2004, of \$78.0 million aggregate principal amount of Fairfax Inc. s 3.15% exchangeable notes due 2010;

the issuance, on November 19, 2004, of \$101.0 million aggregate principal amount of Fairfax Inc. s 3.15% exchangeable notes due 2009;

the debt tender offer completed on December 21, 2004, pursuant to which \$114.7 million aggregate principal amount of debt was tendered and purchased as follows: \$11.1 million aggregate principal amount of TIG s 8 1/8% notes due 2005, \$62.6 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/8% notes due 2006, \$36.5 million aggregate principal amount of our 6 7/8% notes due 2008, and \$4.5 million aggregate principal amount of TIG s 8.597% Capital Securities due 2027; and

the offering of notes completed on December 21, 2004 pursuant to which \$200.0 million aggregate amount of our 7 3/4% notes due 2012 were issued for cash proceeds of \$197.3 million.

For the twelve month period ended September 30, 2004, the following table does not give effect to:

the repurchase, from October 29, 2004 to November 3, 2004, of \$23.0 million aggregate principal amount of TIG s 8.597% Capital Securities due 2027;

the repurchase, on November 1, 2004, of \$5.0 million aggregate principal amount of our 8.3% senior notes due 2026;

Table of Contents

the repurchase, on November 16, 2004 and November 17, 2004, of \$6.5 million aggregate principal amount of our 5.0% convertible senior debentures due 2023;

the repurchase, on November 19, 2004, of \$78.0 million aggregate principal amount of Fairfax Inc. s 3.15% exchangeable notes due 2010;

the issuance, on November 19, 2004, of \$101.0 million aggregate principal amount of Fairfax Inc. s 3.15% exchangeable notes due 2009;

the debt tender offer completed on December 21, 2004, pursuant to which \$114.7 million aggregate principal amount of debt was tendered and purchased as follows: \$11.1 million aggregate principal amount of TIG s 8 1/8% notes due 2005, \$62.6 million aggregate principal amount of our 7 3/8% notes due 2006, \$36.5 million aggregate principal amount of our 6 7/8% notes due 2008, and \$4.5 million aggregate principal amount of TIG s 8.597% Capital Securities due 2027; and

the offering of notes completed on December 21, 2004 pursuant to which \$200.0 million aggregate amount of our 7 3/4% notes due 2012 were issued for cash proceeds of \$197.3 million.

The following table does not reflect the interest cost of our debt and the debt of our subsidiaries issued during the periods as if it was issued at the beginning of the periods.

	<u>Twelve Months Ended December 31, 2003</u>	<u>Twelve Months Ended September 30, 2004</u>
Earnings coverage(1)	4.6x	1.8x

(1) Earnings coverage is equal to net income (excluding unusual items) before interest expense and income taxes divided by interest expense on all debt.

Our interest expense amounted to approximately \$146.3 million and \$165.8 million for the twelve-month periods ended December 31, 2003 and September 30, 2004, respectively. Our earnings before interest expense and income taxes for the twelve-month periods ended December 31, 2003 and September 30, 2004 were approximately \$673.8 million and \$291.9 million, respectively, which is 4.6 times and 1.8 times our interest expense for these periods.

CERTAIN INCOME TAX CONSIDERATIONS

The applicable prospectus supplement may describe the principal Canadian federal income tax considerations generally applicable to investors described therein of purchasing, holding and disposing of securities, including, in the case of an investor who is not a resident of Canada, Canadian non-resident withholding tax considerations.

The applicable prospectus supplement may also describe certain U.S. federal income tax considerations generally applicable of the purchase, holding and disposition of the securities by an investor who is a United States person, including, to the extent applicable, certain relevant U.S. federal income tax rules pertaining to capital gains and ordinary income treatment, original issue discount, whether or not we will be considered a passive foreign investment company (and if so, the tax consequences to a United States shareholder), backup withholding and the foreign tax credit, and any consequences relating to securities payable in a currency other than U.S. dollars, issued at an original discount for U.S. federal income tax purposes or containing early redemption provisions or other special terms.

Table of Contents

DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE

The following documents filed by us with the securities commission or similar authority in each of the provinces of Canada and filed with or furnished to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, are specifically incorporated by reference in this prospectus:

1. our renewal annual information form for the year ended December 31, 2003, dated May 14, 2004;
2. our audited consolidated financial statements and the notes thereto, including balance sheets as at December 31, 2003 and 2002 and earnings, retained earnings and cash flow statements for each of the years in the three year period ended December 31, 2003, together with the report of the auditors thereon;
3. management's discussion and analysis for the annual consolidated financial statements as at and for the periods referred to in paragraph 2;
4. our unaudited interim consolidated financial statements and the notes thereto, including our balance sheet as at September 30, 2004, earnings, and cash flow statements for the three and nine month periods ended September 30, 2004 and 2003, and retained earnings statement for the nine month periods ended September 30, 2004 and 2003;
5. management's discussion and analysis for the unaudited interim consolidated financial statements as at and for the periods referred to in paragraph 4;
6. our management information circular dated March 1, 2004 in connection with the annual meeting of shareholders held on April 14, 2004, other than the sections entitled Executive Compensation, Performance Graph and Statement of Corporate Governance Practices ; and
7. our material change report dated November 5, 2004 relating to the offering of 2,406,741 of our Subordinate Voting Shares.

Any documents of the types referred to in paragraphs 1 through 7 above (excluding confidential material change reports) and any interim financial statements and interim management's discussion and analysis filed by us with the securities regulatory authorities in Canada or filed with or furnished to the SEC after the date of this prospectus and prior to the termination of any offering of securities hereunder shall be deemed to be incorporated by reference into this prospectus. In addition, any report filed with or furnished to the SEC by us pursuant to Section 13(a) or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, or submitted by us to the SEC pursuant to Rule 12g3-2(b) under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, after the date of this prospectus shall be deemed to be incorporated by reference into this prospectus and the registration statement of which this prospectus forms a part, if and to the extent expressly provided in such report.

Any statement contained in a document incorporated or deemed to be incorporated by reference herein shall be deemed to be modified or superseded for the purposes of this prospectus to the extent that a statement contained herein, or in any other subsequently filed document which also is or is deemed to be incorporated by reference herein, modifies or supersedes that statement. The modifying or superseding statement need not state that it has modified or superseded a prior statement or include any other information set forth in the document that it modifies or supersedes. The making of a modifying or superseding statement shall not be deemed an admission for any purposes that the modified or superseded statement, when made, constituted a misrepresentation, an untrue statement of a material fact or an omission to state a material fact that is required to be stated or that is necessary to make a statement not misleading in light of the circumstances in which it was made. Any statement so modified or superseded shall not be deemed, except as so modified or superseded, to constitute a part of this prospectus.

Table of Contents

Upon a new annual information form and new annual financial statements being filed with and, accepted by the applicable securities regulatory authorities during the currency of this prospectus, the previous annual information form, the previous annual financial statements and all interim financial statements, material change reports and information circulars filed prior to the commencement of the then current fiscal year will be deemed no longer to be incorporated into this prospectus for purposes of future offers and sales of securities hereunder.

A prospectus supplement containing the specific terms of an offering of our securities will be delivered to purchasers of such securities together with this prospectus and will be deemed to be incorporated into this prospectus as of the date of such prospectus supplement but only for purposes of the offering of securities covered by that prospectus supplement.

When we update our disclosure of interest coverage ratios by a prospectus supplement, the prospectus supplement filed with applicable securities regulatory authorities that contains the most recent updated disclosure of interest coverage ratios and any prospectus supplement supplying any additional or updated information we may elect to include (provided that such information does not describe a material change that has not already been the subject of a material change report or a prospectus amendment) will be delivered to purchasers of securities together with this prospectus and will be deemed to be incorporated into this prospectus as of the date of the prospectus supplement.

Information has been incorporated by reference in this prospectus from documents filed with securities commissions or similar authorities in Canada. Copies of the documents incorporated herein by reference may be obtained on request without charge from Bradley P. Martin, Vice President and Corporate Secretary, at Suite 800, 95 Wellington Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5J 2N7. For the purpose of the Province of Quebec, this simplified prospectus contains information to be completed by consulting the permanent information record. A copy of the permanent information record may be obtained from our Vice President and Corporate Secretary at the above-mentioned address. Copies of documents that we have filed with the securities regulatory authorities in Canada may be obtained over the Internet at the Canadian Securities Administrators website at www.sedar.com.

We are subject to the informational requirements of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, and in accordance therewith file or furnish reports and other information with or to the SEC. Our recent SEC filings may be obtained over the Internet at the SEC's website at www.sec.gov. You may also read and copy any document we file or furnish with or to the SEC at the public reference facilities maintained by the SEC at Judiciary Plaza, 450 Fifth Street, N.W., Room 1024, Washington, D.C. 20549. Please call 1-800-SEC-0330 for further information on the operations of the public reference facilities and copying charges.

LEGAL MATTERS

Certain legal matters relating to the securities offered by this short form base shelf prospectus will be passed upon on our behalf by Torys LLP, our Canadian counsel, and Shearman & Sterling LLP, our U.S. counsel. As of the date hereof, the lawyers of Torys LLP, directly or indirectly, in aggregate, own less than one percent of our outstanding subordinate voting shares.

EXPERTS

The consolidated financial statements as of December 31, 2003 and 2002 and for each of the years in the three year period ended December 31, 2003 incorporated by reference into this prospectus have been so incorporated in reliance on the report of PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, independent auditors, given on the authority of said firm as experts in accounting and auditing.

AUDITORS, TRANSFER AGENT AND REGISTRAR

Our auditors are PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Chartered Accountants, Royal Trust Tower, Suite 3000, P.O. Box 82, 77 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5K 1G8.

Table of Contents

Our transfer agent and registrar for the Subordinate Voting Shares in Canada is CIBC Mellon Trust Company at its principal office in Toronto, 320 Bay Street, P.O. Box 1, Toronto, Ontario, M5H 4A6, and in the United States is Mellon Investor Services LLC, 120 Broadway, 13th Floor, New York, New York, 10271.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS FILED WITH THE SEC

The following documents have been filed with the SEC as part of the Registration Statement of which this prospectus forms a part: the documents referred to above under the heading Documents Incorporated by Reference ; consents of the independent auditors and Torys LLP; powers of attorney; the indenture; and the Statement of Eligibility of the Trustee on Form T-1.

Table of Contents

AUDITORS CONSENT

We have read the short form base shelf prospectus (the prospectus) of Fairfax Financial Holdings Limited (the company) dated January 24, 2005 which may allow the company to offer for sale from time to time Subordinate Voting Shares, Preferred Shares, Debt Securities, Warrants, Share Purchase Contracts and Units in the aggregate amount of US\$750,000,000. We have complied with Canadian generally accepted standards for an auditor's involvement with offering documents.

We consent to the incorporation by reference in the above-mentioned prospectus of our report to the shareholders of the company on the consolidated balance sheets of the company as at December 31, 2003 and 2002 and the consolidated statements of earnings, retained earnings and cash flows for each of the years in the three year period ended December 31, 2003. Our report is dated February 5, 2004.

(Signed) PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

Chartered Accountants

Toronto, Ontario

January 24, 2005